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A FOOL'S PARADISE.

A Novel.

BY

THOMAS ARCHER,

AUTHOR OF "STRANGE WORK," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1870.

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BOOK II.

Continued.

A FOOL'S PARADISE.

CHAPTER I.

MURDER IN THE AIR.

I FELL close to an angle of the wall, on which the light from Weevil's lantern had shone only a minute before; but all was so dark at the moment that I began to grope my way along, calling in a low voice to know what had become of my companions. I was alarmed to find that they made no reply, and had opened my mouth to cry out still louder, when the moon suddenly emerged from the dark bank of cloud that had obscured her, and I found that I was alone. That was my first impression; but the next moment, when I brought back my eyes to the immediate vicinity, in the hope that I might see Liza or Weevil crouching somewhere amidst the graves, I became aware of the figure of a man standing motionless, with his back to the wall, close beside me, and regarding me with a fixed look, which, combined with his bloodless face and attenuated form, might have belonged to one of the dead, whose appearance above ground could scarcely have been more startling.

I knew those fixed eyes, the white compressed lips; the pallid, set, sharpened face hung with ragged locks of hair, which looked as though they had been bleached to a hempen colour by the wind and rain. As I stared, almost spellbound, I remembered having seen them all, not far from the same spot, when I was trying to escape from Mr. Slokeum, two days before. Has this man been here ever since, or is he a corpse that gets up out of the grave and walks the churchyard? I thought. I shrank back, not knowing whether to stand still or to make some effort to find Weevil and Liza, and went stumbling over the graves and through the long wet grass towards the church, avoiding the great grey head-stones almost by a miracle, and at last reached the broad gravel path leading to the porch, where I peered sharply about to discover the companions of my flight, at the same time clutching beneath my jacket the remnants of bread and meat which had been left from my supper, and the green glass bottle, my hold upon which I had retained at considerable inconvenience and no little danger.

As I reached the porch the church clock struck out, and, with a great terror upon me, I crouched close to the heavy oaken door and sank down upon the cold stone step.

I knew that the only monuments in the church were one set up to the memory of Mr. Blundell Fairhoe, who had been killed in battle, and was buried in some foreign churchyard; and another by the side of it, to Mrs. Fairhoe, the great lady whose funeral I had been held up at the window to see when I was a little child

with nurse Purley. Her son (Mrs. Fairhoe's son, I mean) came to Grundon church sometimes. I could just see the top of his head and the feathers in his wife's bonnet from my corner in the organ gallery as they sat in their big pew; but I had never caught sight of their faces but once, when they stopped to speak to the Vicar as we were all coming round the corner. That was one Sunday when they came on horseback; but they usually rode in a carriage, for their house was a good way from the church. Our schoolmaster had taken us for a walk one day into the woods, where he let us run about, and we passed Mr. Fairhoe's house on our way home. Weevil said he should like to have a house like that, and told me that when he grew up he meant to be a bailiff, and to manage land and houses for some gentleman like Mr. Fairhoe. I remember that while we were talking we saw somebody coming along the road on horseback, a dark, black-whiskered man, and that when he saw us he stopped and waited till our master came up, and told him that "he'd have him know we were not to go about in Fairhoe wood or he'd order us to be whipped."

He was so angry, and raised his heavy riding-whip in such a threatening manner, that I thought he would have begun to lay it upon us then; and, indeed, several of the boys shrunk away to the side of the hedge. I could see our master's pale face flush, and one or two deep white scars upon it turn whiter as he grasped his cane; but he only said, "I dare say we shall not trespass on your master's ground again, Mr. Harrick; you

needn't threaten, sir;" and then we all passed on. Weevil told me afterwards that this Mr. Harrick was Mr. Fairhoe's bailiff, and we talked that night in a whisper about what each of us would do if we had a great house and plenty of money.

All these recollections crowded together and mingled confusedly with my fears, as I sat, dreading to venture out from the corner where I crouched, with my back against the church door.

I had summoned courage to call out, not very loudly, once or twice, in the hope that Weevil and Liza might be concealed somewhere close by; but the conviction began to settle upon me that they had gone away altogether and left me to my fate—left me, without a word of warning or encouragement, by some road where I should never overtake them if I waited for the morning.

Footsteps sounded on the gravel at some distance, and, almost before I could shrink back into the shadow of a projecting buttress, a man came by at a furious pace, gesticulating and cutting the air with a heavy whip which he carried in his hand. Even by that uncertain light I knew him. It was Mr. Fairhoe's steward—the man who had threatened to horsewhip us, and had forbidden us to walk in the woods; now he seemed to threaten something unseen, and to walk like a man escaping from pursuit, muttering as he went.

I could not help wondering whether he would go striding across the graves and through the long, tangled grass, to the wall where he would meet with that still, spare figure, and that fixed, white face; and, if so,

what he would do. Before I had quite settled the idea in my mind, however, he had gone crunching past, and I had time to look round me to see if there was any way of escape.

Have I mentioned that I had begun to pass the time by eating a little piece of the bread and meat, and that I had even put the green bottle to my lips before I left the porch? I tried both, and found that the contents of the bottle first warmed me, then set me on fire, and finally, now that I had come out into the open space, made me feel as though the very earth of the churchyard was heaving round me, dark and billowy. I felt sick, and reeled as I tried to steady myself against the rough stone wall, along which I presently began to feel my way.

I hadn't to go far before I came to a part of the church where, in spite of my giddiness and confusion, I knew that there was a little doorway reached by a couple of dirty, broken steps. It was at the back of the church tower in a sort of niche made in the corner where the tower itself joined the main building; and I had never seen the door open, although it had been an object of interest to me ever since I had learned that it led to the belfry.

I stumbled upon it so suddenly that, in falling over the two lop-sided steps, my head came pretty smartly against the door itself, which was a small, low-browed, black, dusty piece of carpentry, opening without ceremony on to a steep, rickety stair. Before I thought of what I was doing, and with no defined purpose, I crawled into the small space made by the angle of the

wall, and in another moment the door shut behind me with a smart snap, leaving me in darkness and unable to find any means of unfastening it from the inside.

How long I sat there on the lower stair I can't tell, but I must have fallen asleep with fatigue, for I woke suddenly on hearing the grating of a key; and, although it was still dark, groped my way towards the top of the stairs, where, on turning a sharp corner, I saw the glimmer of a light.

Crawling upward until the narrow steps became almost like a ladder, I reached a square opening. Beyond this was a small boarded space, the beams and projections around which were but faintly revealed by the yellow gleams from a lantern which, with a large tin can, stood in the middle of the floor. Around me there hung several ropes, only the lower ends of which were visible, since they began high up in the impenetrable gloom and were lost amidst great beams and cranks only dimly seen as the moonlight now and then glinted in at a long narrow slit in the tower far above my head. It was very awful to look upward at this dark abyss and think that, perhaps, the bells were swinging silently in that crazy chamber, which seemed to rock even when a sudden gust of wind smote it, and went sighing and shivering round its outer walls until it found an entrance, and swung the snaky ropes gently to and fro. I had no time to dwell on these things however, for I heard footsteps on the stair, and presently the voices of two people talking as they came up, one behind the other. I huddled beneath a projecting beam, where I had to lie down on my face in the

shadow which it threw upon the floor, and listened, with my heart beating so that its pulses seemed loud enough to drown any ordinary sound.

"It's precious lucky as I made the old man gi' me the key, arter all," said the man who came first; "much he'd left the door open, hadn't he? I'm blessed if I thought *I* ever should, wi' such a rusty old lock. Reglar strained my hand, it has."

"Lor, this ain't half a place. You should go over to Ipswich if you want to see ringin' done somethin' like," replied the other.

"Well, we can manage a pretty tidy 'triple bob' here, mind yer."

"Can you? Well, I don't say as you can't. But why ain't the rest on you here?" retorted the second comer, lifting the can, and moving it so as to turn the liquor slowly round and round before carrying it to his lips.

It was evident that an addition to the party was expected; and presently some more men came up, until there was very little room for them, except at the ropes, where, having first taken off their coats, they began to ring a peal.

Amidst the creaking, clanging, groaning, and general tumult, in which no one sound was to be distinguished, but which seemed as though it would burst the very walls with its reverberations, I lay upon the floor and felt it rock beneath me, until I clutched the edges of the beam by my side, in fear of some of the boards giving way. There was no chance of escape, unless I could crawl between the legs of the two men nearest

to me, one of whom called out strange directions to his fellows, who tugged and tore at the ropes as though they meant to drag them down and involve themselves and the building in one general ruin. I had almost made up my mind to attempt it, however, when they all suddenly ceased, and, amidst the surging of the last waves of sound and the buzzing of the metal tongues above, one of the party untied a large bundle that I had seen him bring with him and produced two quartern loaves and a huge wedge of cheese.

They were all too hot and breathless to talk much, and the clamour of the bells was still in my ears, so that I could scarcely hear; but they all paid assiduous attention to the can, which was emptied at the first round.

"Th' old man might ha' left a double allowance to-night," said one of them, as he turned the can upside down; "sometimes he stows away a bottleful in some corner or another, if we could but find it—jest a drop for a wet like when he tolls for a funeral or of a week-service. If one could but find it now" —— he continued, lifting the lantern and peering into the very place where I was lying, "hullo! what's this?" he exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of my head: "here's somebody as don't belong here, anyway."

He was a big burly fellow, and with his hand in my neck had me on my feet in a twinkling. Before either of us could say a word, one of his companions had caught sight of the green bottle that I still held tightly.

"By George! look'ee here," he called out, laughing, "what's this?"

"Please, sir, I brought it," I stammered; "and if you'll let me go you can have it directly."

"Why, of course," laughed another good-humoured young fellow, gently disengaging my neck; "don't you see the old man's been and sent us a drop o' stuff, and this young mole's been and gone to sleep with it a-waitin' for us; that's how the door came to be shut when Jeffries got here. Look at him," he continued, pointing to me, "he's dazed wi' the bells, clean dazed; there's a many look so till they're used to 'em. Didn't the old man give you a glass to bring with it, boy?"

"No," said I, fearing further inquiries; "but I must go, please."

"Be off with you, then, and take care you don't break your precious young neck down them stairs. Here, will you have a bit o' bread an' cheese?"

He tore off about half one of the loaves as he spoke, and, with a great fragment of cheese, thrust it into my hand. I think I should have told him how I had run away from the Union, and have asked him to help me to find Weevil and Liza, had he spoken to me again; but he was occupied with the bottle, and having once hesitated, I knew not how to resume my story. I had already begun by saying, "Please, sir," however, when one of the others, seeing me still standing there, said,

"Oh! he wants a penny. Don't you see the boy's been here precious early? Let's make it a penny apiece; come, now, and that'll give him a good start home."

They very willingly agreed to this, and before I could resume my confessions a handful of coppers were collected.

"Why, where's your pocket?" said the last speaker. "Here's a boy without any pockets! I'm blest if I ever did! Ain't you got no pocket-hanksher neither?"

I said I had, and hastened to produce the small square of printed calico called by that name from the breast of my skeleton-jacket; in this he tied the coppers, and then, with gentle force, lifted me down two or three of the stairs and bade me go at once if I didn't want to be shut up in the church all night.

Whether any discussion on my appearance ensued I cannot tell; but before I had reached the bottom stair I heard two or three of them shouting to me to come back, and, in fear lest they should overtake me and give me up to the authorities represented by Mr. Slokeum, I fled, as fast as my weary little legs would carry me, across the churchyard, where the dirty grey stones were just showing in the first light of morning.

All that day I lived upon my bread and cheese and the water that I dipped with my cap from a little stream which I had reached in my wandering journey. I passed the time principally in crying and sleeping at intervals; and I knew that I was too tired to walk far, so I rested under hedges and behind trees, and found out how to keep myself from the sharp gusts of wind by lying on the right side of a sloping hillock. I discovered many wonders that were new to me; and

thinking, in my childish way, that I might soon find out the great mystery of death also, said my prayers before I went to sleep and again when I waked; not that I feared death itself—for children know no more what it means than their elders, and have not lived long enough to dread it—but I feared the pain, and the hunger, and the lonesomeness that must come before the end. As the evening drew on, this dread of the great lonely fields and woods was so terrible that I dragged my sore feet along in the grass near the road, and, after walking some distance, made towards a long low range of buildings where lights were shining, in the hope of finding some one who would give me food and shelter in exchange for two or three of the pence that I still carried slung in my handkerchief.

It was a very large house, and I could see no one about it, for the lights were at a part that fell back from a carriage drive which swept away from the road round a large piece of ground in front planted with trees and shrubs. It was getting late I knew, and some of the lights at the upper windows were put out, so that there was no time to lose; but nobody was stirring outside, and I dared not knock at the great door, before which I stood for a moment out of the way of the sudden gusts of wind and driving rain that drenched my threadbare clothes through and through. On one side of the house I could see a low white balcony, which seemed to lead round to the back, and following the path as well as I could in the dark, came to an iron gate left unfastened, and opening at once to a broad piece of grass, and what looked like a large garden. I

had no time to notice this, however, for from a window quite near the ground, and not far from where I stood, a bright light shone.

It was a large window, all full of panes of glass of different sizes, and partly shaded by a creeping plant that swung and rattled in the wind and showered down great drops of rain upon me as I crept under it to see what chance I had of help or pity. I was such a child, and felt so wretched in my loneliness, that I fancied nothing worse could happen to me than what had happened already. I would even consent to go back to Mrs. Scraper if only she would say a word for me to the new master and save me from the punishment he was sure to devise in return for my running away. What did it matter now that Liza and Weevil had proved false and left me to myself to die? This thought so overcame me that I was compelled to use my pocket-handkerchief with the halfpence tied up in it, and they left me such a very small corner that my eyes were quite dim, and everything was blurred when I at last summoned courage to look through the window.

There were a lady and gentleman there; a lady in a rich dress, holding a lamp, from which the strong light that I had seen fell upon a large sort of desk beneath a bookcase, and upon the gentleman who seemed to be forcing it open with something that he held in his hand. His head was bent down at his task, and he seemed to be searching for something, for a table in the room was strewed with letters and papers.

Before I had seen all this clearly the desk that he

was trying to force flew open, but at that moment a great gust of wind drove the rain like a shower of small stones against the glass, and sent the boughs of the creeper beneath which I stood crashing through the casement. The lady had started back, alarmed at the sudden violence of the storm, and, before I could escape from the window where I had crouched down and taken off my cap that I might press my face closer to the pane, she saw me. I don't know whether she cried out, for in another moment the gentleman, looking up and seeing me there, took her by the arm and drew her towards the door; then the lamp went out, and I ran as fast as I could towards the road, where I crawled beneath the shrubs that skirted the garden. I had scarcely done so when I heard someone come out at the front door, shut it softly, and walk swiftly round the carriage-drive into the road. By some strange impulse, never since explained, but perhaps from my dread of being alone all night in the fields, I followed him, the occasional glimpses of the moon enabling me to keep him in sight. After running till I was almost ready to fall on the wet path and give up the chase, he slackened his pace a little, and at last turned into a by-road, where, behind a white paling, there stood a cottage with a candle in the window.

He had reached the front door, and was about to open it with a key, when a man, whom he had not seen, came out from the shelter of the projecting roof and addressed him by his name—a name which made me shrink back lest I should be seen.

"Good evening, Mr. Harrick, if it isn't too late.

This is pretty weather for visiting, isn't it? especially when you're obliged to wait outside."

The voice was so familiar to me that I began to fancy I was in a dream again; and when Mr. Harrick said, "What do you want with me, then, Mr. Swiffle?" I expected to wake up in the closet where I had been put to sleep the night before.

They went in and shut the door, and I was about to turn away when a man came out of the yard by the side of the cottage, and saw me scuttling along in the mud.

"Hallo, younker," he cried out, "what are you up to there, you young vagabone?"

I was too weak and faint to speak, but I crawled towards him as he stood with a stable lantern in his hand, and held out my hands in piteous appeal. There must have been something sad in the appearance of such a little fellow so soiled with mud, so pale, so drenched with rain, and with such tired, hungry eyes; for the good fellow fell to crying and swearing at the same time, and taking me by the arm drew me gently into a kind of outhouse where there was a fire glowing, beneath what I afterwards knew was a brick oven.

A cross-looking woman was busy making bread, and a delightful scent of newly-baked loaves pervaded the place.

"Lookee here, missis," said the man, thrusting me forward; "here's a poor little feller been and turned up as, I'll pound it, is lost himself. Aint ye got a sup o' broath or sum'at for him? We can make him up com-

fortable enough in the hayloft, and Master Harrick, he aint no call to hear tell on it."

"Now if that aint just like you, John," said the woman, looking at me keenly, "bringing in any beggar's brat as you pick up off o' the road; and my sakes if he aint one o' the workus, too," she added, examining still more narrowly. "Well, we can send him back in the mornin' at any rate."

"Yes," said John, evidently wishing to maintain the present advantage by conciliation, "I'll see to that fast enough; but just let him have a warm an' a bite, Missis, poor little varmint; he's right down speechless."

I was, indeed; and the warmth of the fire, and the great horsecloth which the good-natured fellow buckled round me while he dried my clothes, only thawed me into tears. When he had brought me a wooden bowl of water to wash my hands and face, and the cross-looking woman had given me a basin of nice warm broth, full of soaked bread, I dressed myself again, and was led by my guide to a loft over the stable, where I burrowed a soft, warm cavity, and fell into a profound sleep, from which I was awakened by a hand laid gently on my arm.

It was my friend of the night before, whose head and shoulders appeared from below, where he was standing on a ladder in the stable. He had his finger on his lips, and, when he saw that I was awake, spoke in a whisper.

"It's time you was up, my poor little lad," he said; "an' if you raly du belong to the workus, my advice

is, for the Lord's sake, go back, an' say you're sorry you strayed away. Don't you lose no time about it, because Master Harrick, he'll be about here presently, and I know what you'll get if he has the takin' of you back. Do go, now, there's a good little lad. Here! here's a hanksher full o' coppers as you left down below; an' here's sixpence to put to 'em; and here's a good slice o' bread an' meat to last you till you get your dinner. So now come along, or else I shall have the missis about my ears, I can tell you."

I don't know whether, in my heart of hearts, I meant to follow the good man's advice; but at all events I thought I would defer its execution till later in the day, and, with a childish perversity which is common not alone to children, I set off to eat my breakfast in the woods.

I think I must have had some vague hope of coming upon Weevil and Liza on the London road, or of waiting till they had given up searching for me, and then seeing them come along on their journey and joining their company; but, whatever may have been the subtle reason, I lost it among the trees.

Perhaps Mr. Swiffle had stayed all night at Mr. Harrick's, for I saw him coming out at the gate just as I had scrambled through a gap in the hedge that divided the roadway from the fields. I had some thought of speaking to him, but before I could do so Harrick himself came out to overtake him, carrying an open letter in his hand.

"See here!" he said. "This is all I wanted, Swiffle."

"What is it?"

"The certificate."

"Where were they——?"

"Ha! ha! That's tellings, Mr. Swiffle. Wait till I've done with it what I mean to do this morning, and then you'll know some day. Don't be surprised if you see me in Grundon at noon. Good-day, I'm off yonder."

He went away with such evil exultation in his face that it struck me even then that he must be going to do some wicked thing; though he was smartly dressed and so cleanly shaved that a blue tinge just showed on his chin and lips where his beard had been, his face was haggard, but was set in a sneering smile, and he walked for some time with one hand in the breast of his coat, as though he wished to take care of something that was concealed there. I lost my fears of him, too, in the wood, where I rambled on, having made up my mind to turn back before dark and go to Mrs. Scraper rather than stay out all night. I had no means of knowing how the time passed, for there was no clock within hearing. The sky was dark and lowering, too, so that by the sun it might have been any hour of the day. There was no rain; but a soughing, moaning wind rustled the dead, sodden leaves as they lay upon the ground and muttered among the wet boughs. Some unutterable secret seemed to lie between earth and heaven, of which premonitory signs and whispers only had escaped. Do children feel these things? Yes; but they do not think them in words. They feel instinctively, at such a time, the

foreboding influences of nature; and, if they retain the gift when they grow older, learn to recognise the possibility of some subtle relation between such outer manifestations of the material world and the inner life of men.

Whatever was the secret that the clouds brooded over, I could not guess it as I waded through a thick, oozy carpet of those fallen leaves, and came out towards the edge of a narrow path, ending in a little glade, where I could see the rabbits running and disappearing in their burrows.

I had stopped for a moment under the forked trunk of an old tree, on which only a few young twigs showed that the sap still ran beneath its rugged bark, and had made up my mind to climb into the hollow between its two large limbs, and there eat the rest of my bread and meat, when I heard footsteps coming along the path where it turned towards a thicket further on. By exerting all the little strength I had, I contrived to reach my perch before any one had approached; but I had no sooner looked out from the hollow, in which I found that I could sit almost concealed, than I saw a man come swiftly along the edge of the path, looking at a watch that he held in his hand.

When he had reached a spot from which he could see the path for some distance, where it spread into a broader footway to the glade beyond, he walked leisurely to and fro, but at the same time looked sharply here and there, and drummed impatiently with his fingers upon his hat, which he had taken off as though the heat oppressed him.

It was Mr. Harrick, and he was waiting for somebody.

Another lighter sound upon the fallen leaves—a sweeping, rustling sound, louder than that made by the dying wind—and he was joined by a lady; the same tall, handsome lady whom I had seen the night before in that room with him. I knew her now—Mrs. Fairhoe; and I felt a sort of fascination in looking at her and watching her every movement.

As they stood there, she looking at him proudly and keeping at some distance, I thought he seemed to be urging something with passionate gestures. Once he approached her; but she put out her hand to stay him. I could hear nothing that either of them said, until they walked towards the place where I was in hiding, and then he was striving to take her hand; but she tore it away and seemed to threaten him. She was white with rage, and, as he spoke to her some words which ended in a sneering laugh, she staggered back and leaned against a tree, at the same time motioning him away.

He had taken a letter from his pocket, and, after opening it and seeming to tell her its contents, would have held her in his arms; but she shook him off and came rapidly along the path, he following her.

I could hear him now, when he said, "It is useless to struggle against it. You know what your supposed marriage has made you. I will give you all the reparation you can ever find. Consent, and——"

He had placed his arm round her again, and held her in such a grasp as she could not shake off, when a

fair-haired gentleman leaped out from the wood clear into the middle of the footway and confronted him.

"You damned infernal villain!" he cried; "I have you at last."

He had raised a heavy whip, and was about to strike, when Harrick sprang back and, with all the fire dying out of his eyes, drew a pistol from the breast of his coat.

"Stand back!" he shouted; "I have something in both hands for you; and, as for your lady wife ——"

Again the fair-haired gentleman advanced upon him; their voices were blended in threats of vengeance, and the dead leaves were being trampled into deep ruts. A sharp report seemed to disturb the heavy air, a wreath of blue smoke curled up from behind the thicket, and Harrick, staggering a pace or two, threw up his arms with a wild, despairing cry, and fell upon his face.

CHAPTER II.

I BECOME A VAGABOND.

THAT wild cry was followed by a more appalling silence.

The very wind seemed to fall suddenly and to end its whisperings amongst the leaves; the scared birds fluttered away and stopped their faint chirping; and as the puff of smoke rose slowly and dispersed in the air, a few watery beams of sunlight broke through the overhanging cloud and fell upon a little red pool that had trickled into a footprint in the sodden path where the dead man lay.

I turned sick and faint, and should have fallen, but the trunk of the tree on which I knelt had formed into a sort of hollow bowl, where I could look over the rim, my knees being protected from the rough wood by a layer of moss and decayed leaves.

The stillness was more oppressive than any sound that could have come to disturb it, and I should have screamed out in a very agony of terror but that my attention was fixed upon that stately lady who stood quite still, with her clenched hands resting on her bosom; her white, fear-stricken face turned towards her husband, who, seeing his antagonist fall so sud-

denly, had stopped the blow which he had aimed at him, midway, and now, with a groan of pain and horror, dashed across the path to the place whence the shot had come, bursting through the low brushwood with his heavy whip still raised in his hand.

He came out again presently, his clothes torn and his hands bleeding; but he had found nobody concealed in the bush, and was about to search further when Mrs. Fairhoe beckoned him. He went over to her at once, and she said something to him in a low voice—too low for me to hear. Then he looked round, shuddering, and with an expression of fear upon his face that it had not worn before; and they moved slowly away together.

Before they had gone twenty steps that stately lady turned back again, as I thought, to look at the body; for she went quite close, lifting her dress lest she should touch the edge of it in the little red pool which by that time had filled the footprint, and was now being splashed with the rain that had begun to patter on the leaves again.

One arm of the murdered man was doubled under him as he lay upon his face; the other, with the hand still clutching the pistol, was stretched almost across the narrow path.

His hat had fallen off, and rolled to a little ridge of grass beside the footway.

Something white, fluttering beside it, caught Mrs. Fairhoe's eye, and she would have taken it up at once, but it was at some distance beyond the dead man, whom she must pass to reach it. I could see, or, at

all events, I fancied that she was afraid to go past the body, though it lay there quite still, the wind scarcely stirring the close black hair, and even the very clothes seeming to have grown rigid. She must either have gone quite out of the path lower down, and so passed amidst the trees, or have stepped over that extended arm; and though she approached it twice, and gathered the skirt of her dress close that she might spring across, she shrunk back, and at last came round beneath the old tree where I was sitting, and entered the lane at a point higher up. Here she gave a hurried glance round, and, with her face still turned towards the body of the steward, seized the paper which lay half hidden by the hat from which it had fallen. It looked like a folded letter, and she scarcely glanced at it before slipping it into her pocket and holding it there. Then she sprang into the road again, and, without looking back, rejoined her husband who had been waiting for her at the turn of the road. I heard the distant sound of a horse's hoofs upon the clay, and was left alone, the only witness of that dumb thing that never moved, and which kept me also motionless lest I should disturb it into life.

When I could collect such few thoughts as had been left me I determined to run away and get back to Grundon Union before nightfall. Even the wrath of Mrs. Scraper and the violence of Mr. Slokeum would be better than to pass the hours after dark in that terrible place.

Shutting my eyes quite tight and grasping the edge of the tree-trunk with my numbed and stiffened hands,

I scrambled down as best I could, and, without looking back, prepared to run by the way that I had come, when I heard a rustling and cracking of branches at some little distance, and, venturing to peep out, saw a man come out into the open ground where some trees had been cleared away. He strode on, looking wildly about him, his clenched hands moving hither and thither, as though he fought with some unseen foe, his clothes all ragged and wet with long exposure to the rain, his matted, streaming hair all hanging over his livid face. *That* face—the face that I had seen by the churchyard wall—with its sharp, stony, haggard features all wrought upon by a dread impulse that made them twitch and quiver as though they were moved by some infernal spasm that changed their very shape and yet left the same expression on them under every aspect! Crashing through the thicket, floundering in the leaf-strewn ruts, plashing in the shallow miry pools, he came on with no eye for any other object than the corpse that seemed to drag him towards it against his will. It was this spell which he was fighting against, and, child as I was, standing trembling there, I think I knew that this man's hand had fired the shot, and guessed that this awful fascination was the murderer's doom. As he came nearer I could hear his laboured breath come and go, and could see the vapour of it steaming from his quivering nostrils as he put back the hair from his forehead and panted like a hunted hare.

He slackened his pace when he got quite close to his victim, and a strong tremor came upon him as he saw

that little horrible crimson pool; then, still drawn on and on, he stooped with his hands upon his shaking knees, and scanned the body closely, trying, as it seemed to me, to peer under it, that he might catch a glimpse of the dead man's face.

I had myself been wondering how that face would look, and in the midst of my fears a few minutes before had been speculating on the change that had come upon it, and whether he had smiled or frowned before he died, and if the jaw had dropped, as I had been told was the case with all dead faces; and now fear itself was almost lost in the expectation that the murderer himself would turn it upward to the sky, and then go howling into the woods, or wander over miles of country, till he was starved and hunted down, or gave himself up to be hanged.

He had leaned still further forward and was about to touch that rigid outstretched arm, when a shadow fell across the path, and he started to his feet with a menacing gesture, while his hand sought something in a side pocket. When he brought it out he held a long clasp-knife, its blade opening with a spring and a sound like the click of a pistol.

It was only at that moment that I saw another man standing opposite him, the body of the steward between them in the footway; a red-brown, lithe, sinewy man, with a black beard fringing his lean face; and such strangely shining eyes that I could see them where I stood, as I had seen a cat's eyes glimmering in the twilight. He had come as silently as the shadow that he threw upon the ground, and I believe it must have

been the shadow and not he that was the cause of the murderer's first alarm.

He held in both hands a rough and rather long stick, which looked as though it had just been cut from one of the neighbouring trees; and his clothes were of a rough, coarse kind. He stood quite quietly, with his eyes fixed on the pale face opposite him, which looked all the paler and more haggard by contrast with his own sunburnt cheeks, and the jetty side-locks that hung in a curl on each temple.

"What do you do here?" said the murderer, in a hard, choking voice. "You have a desperate man to deal with in me, and had best not try to stop me."

"I've no call to ask you what you've done here, and I could have stopped you a minute ago if I'd been so minded," was the retort. "Put that knife up, neighbour, or you'll cut yourself before you hurt me. I'm no chicken to be had for the carving." He gave his long staff such a menacing twirl as he spoke, and looked so keenly into his opponent's face, that the other dropped the hand that held his weapon, and would have moved away, but that even then he seemed to fear to turn his back upon or his eyes away from the corpse.

"Look here!" said the stranger, pointing to the pistol in the dead man's hand; "you haven't half done your work. Who's to know whether a man's killed by that or by a gun, whether he's killed by himself or by another? Don't fear me. I told him long ago I'd be back in Fairhoe Wood when the day o' reckoning came; though even my Rommany sight couldn't

tell that it would be to-day, or who'd cast that reckoning up. What was your grudge, man, that it could only be paid in such bloody coin? I knew what his end would be, but when and why I had to learn. I know the when; you'll tell me the why."

The man seemed to wrench his eyes from the lifeless form at his feet by a sudden effort, and looked his questioner in the face.

"What is it to you?" he muttered. "Let it alone. Go your way, and I'll go mine. Enough that I had good cause to owe him hate, and that my debt is paid. Mine and hers—mine and hers," he added, not withdrawing his gaze, but standing like an animal at bay.

"Your name's Orwood," replied the other, peering at him closely, and advancing till his feet almost touched the corpse. "I know what the debt was, and it's such as my people don't forget to pay for our sisters either. The Roman men will thank you well for this morning's work, neighbour."

I could not hear what words were whispered between them, but I saw that they both referred to the dead man, and that the murderer shrank back wild and scared when the gipsy stooped down and took the pistol from the clenched fingers. I saw, too, that he strode away and covered his quivering face when his companion raised the body and turned it a little on its side. At that moment the gipsy took from the dead hand—the hand which had lain beneath the body as it fell—a piece of crumpled paper, all wet and stained with the withered leaves on which it had been pressed. With the look of some startled beast which fears sur-

prise, he placed it in his breast. I saw all this, though I had watched it less from any interest I felt than from terror and the hope of seizing some moment to make my escape without being discovered.

I had already crept further back beyond the tree whose gnarled roots and rough trunk had served to hide me, and was preparing to run across a piece of open waste to a mere track by which I remembered having come to that spot from the broader path across the wood, when the small bundle of which I had kept possession, the handkerchief containing my few coppers, gave way, and the coppers themselves fell clinking on the only stones that lay within a dozen yards.

There was no time to pick them up; no time to do anything but make a last effort to reach the wood before I was perceived; but I could not restrain a whimpering cry, in which, perhaps, all the pent-up horror at what I had witnessed found expression. It ended in a shriek of utter despair and an appeal for mercy, when I heard a light, swift footstep behind me, and turning as I ran, saw the gipsy with the pistol in his hand.

I sank on my knees so suddenly, that a less nimble pursuer would have fallen over me, and I might have had the opportunity I sought; but he leaped over me as I fell, and, doubling in a moment, had his hand upon my mouth, and turned me on my back in an instant.

"Don't cry out, or I'll kill you," he said, breathlessly; "stay here quiet till I come back for you, and you shan't come to harm; but only try to move or speak a word without I give you leave, and I'll——" His

gleaming eyes and the white teeth that he ground together as he threatened me finished the sentence. I lay there watching him in an agony, the memory of which haunted my dreams for years afterwards. He came back again after he had turned away, as though some sudden thought had struck him, and, kneeling down, whispered in my ear, "How long have you been here, and what have you seen?"

There was nothing to be gained by a lie, and, indeed, it scarcely occurred to me to tell one. "I've been here all the morning, sir," I faltered; "and I've seen everything before you came—when the lady and gentleman went away, and the shot went off, and the blood, and everything—oh dear! oh dear! please——" I was breaking into a whimper again, when he lifted his finger and bade me be still, or he would come back presently and kill me. He looked so capable of doing it, and I thought it so probable, that I felt the solid earth on which I lay go round with me. A sound of rushing wind swept through the trees, amidst which I heard the bells of Grundon church ringing a distant peal, that increased to a roar, and so lost myself altogether, only retaining the dim consciousness of some hostile presence. In fact, I fainted, and must have lain in that state for some time, as when I at last struggled back to recognition of immediate objects I was sensible of a keen smell of burning, and found the gipsy bending over me with a piece of smouldering rag, which he held beneath my nose.

"Come, my little lad," he said, more kindly than I expected, "you'll have to go along with me; for if that

man you saw half an hour ago finds you here you know what he'll do, don't you?"

I said I was afraid I did; and, in answer to further questioning, told him how I came to run away, and entreated him to take me back to Grundon and Mrs. Scraper.

He had looked at me several times with the same sort of stare that I had seen in his eyes before; but when he heard that I had been a foundling and had lived all my life in the Union, he stopped suddenly, and, with his hands upon my shoulders, stooped down and seemed to read my face, as though he looked for something beneath the very skin. When I again besought him to let me go he held me the tighter, and dragged me on at a pace that my poor little legs could scarcely keep up with.

He must have become aware of this, for, to my surprise, he checked himself suddenly, and, lifting me in his arms, threw me across his shoulder and went on faster than before, without regarding my crying, except to say, "Hush! my pretty boy," in a tone so unlike that in which he had first spoken that I cried the more, not knowing but that he might still contemplate putting me to death when he reached some convenient spot for the purpose. This notion accorded so completely with some of Weevil's stories about gipsies—none of whom ever appeared in Grundon Union, but of whose habits certain tramps had revealed to him strange particulars during his stolen visits to the stoneyard—that I gave myself up for lost when he at last put me down in a low-lying part of

the wood, and gave a shrill whistle which was answered from the midst of a ring of trees where smoke was rising from a little dell. Here, before going further, he sat down, and, drawing me towards him, wiped the tears from my face with a bright silk handkerchief.

"See here, my pretty lad," he said, "you'll be none the worse for coming to live with me amongst the gipsies. You know I'm one of the gipsies, don't you? Your people call us gipsies, but we are kind folk, and there are women there to take care of you, and you shall have a pony to ride, and a good dinner every day. But you mustn't say a word about what you've seen this morning till I give you leave, do you hear? That man will come and——you know what he'll do, don't you?"

Again I said I did know; and, as I said it, I thought of the body lying out there on the path by that little red pool, and wondered whether anybody had passed that way and found it, and if the murderer, of whom I was to be in such constant dread, was a gipsy, too.

This last thought was so oppressive that I ventured to ask the question.

"No, not he," said my strange companion. "You'll never see him again, boy. Wherever you may think you see a man like him, it won't be *that* man, but only a stranger, with quite another name. You'll remember that. Did you say your name was Valentine Day?"

"Yes; that is what they called me."

"Then my name's Rory Lee, and we're friends.

You'll see how good it is to have me for a friend presently; and if I'm away for a little while, it'll be to go to London, and when I come back you shall go about with me, and I'll learn you something that will be better than all they can learn you at that big poor-house at Grundon. Wouldn't you like some nice hot dinner, Valentine?"

I said I should like it very much; and, in truth, my little childish heart had so long yearned for kindness, that even the talk of my captor began to be pleasant to me, and I already doubted the truth of Weevil's information; but whenever I warmed a little towards my strange companion the thought of the murdered man, and that of the dreadful white face that haunted me so constantly, turned me cold again.

There was no time to think more of this subject, however; for the whistle that I had heard was repeated, and an old grey-haired man, in a green smock and long leather gaiters, made his appearance on the other side of a low hedge. He was smoking a short black pipe, and carried something slung in a cotton handkerchief, and something else in his hat, which he held in his hand.

I was glad to find that he addressed my companion by the name that he had mentioned, and that Rory Lee was a real personage; while, to judge of the old man's tone, he was entitled to some kind of respect. Their talk was a sort of jargon, of which I could make nothing then; but I knew that it related to me, and was interested when the gipsy resumed the conversation by saying, "Well, gaffer, what have you got for

dinner? the younker's hungry, and I've had neither bite nor sup to-day."

"Well," replied the old man, "there's a stew over yonder that Thyrza's busy with, and I've got these here, Rory, if you haven't lost the taste on 'em, lad."

"Otchiwitchi?"

"Yes; a brace on 'em; but the young 'un don't like the looks on 'em, do he?"

I was a little alarmed at the idea of eating such prickly things for dinner, for when the old man turned his hat towards us I could see nothing but a spiky ball, and thought with dismay that I should be forced to devour it.

"It's what folks call a hedgehog, young 'un," explained the old man, grinning; "and we'll soon teach you to cook 'em. Come along." So saying, he led the way to the ring of trees, where I saw a large tilt-cart drawn up, and a wall-eyed grey horse nibbling at some hay; at a little distance, were two donkeys also tethered to an iron stake fixed in the ground.

A fire was burning in a sort of rude stove by the hedgeside, made of half a dozen bricks and a couple of pieces of iron hoop; on the fire stood a small iron pot, over which a woman was stooping, that she might stir its contents with a large wooden spoon. She was a small, wiry woman, with a head-dress made of a gaudy red and yellow handkerchief, beneath which a pair of heavy gold earrings were not quite hidden by the straggling locks of jet black hair that fell in crimpy curls upon her neck. Her face was of the same red

brown as Rory Lee's, and I soon learnt that her name was Thyrza Lee, and that they were related in some way, though she was older than he, and looked coarser and more weather-beaten. But I was too tired and faint to care much for any fresh incident, and after I had crawled to the fire, where the woman took an apple from her pocket and gave it me to munch, I became absorbed in watching the preparation of the otchiwitchi. The process was simple enough. The old man, having lighted another fire of dry sticks and leaves, which he blew to a red heat with a pair of bellows from the tilted cart, went to a little distance and returned with a lump of clay, in which, after having operated on the hedgehogs with a clasp-knife, he entirely enveloped them, and placed the mass in the midst of the bright hot embers. There they were left to cook, while the woman served us out each a hunch of bread and a portion of soup in a yellow basin, containing an iron spoon. I could scarcely eat my allowance for thinking of what was to come; but the soup was rich and good, and I felt drowsy from the influence of the fire. Presently the old man, whom they called Gaffer, raked out the lump of clay with one of the pieces of hoop, and, having cleverly broken it open, turned out two delicate-looking objects upon a wooden platter, which had also appeared from the tilt-cart. The spikes had remained embedded in the clay, and the otchiwitchi were as tempting as a pair of boiled chickens to a hungry convalescent; but I had lost all sense of time or place with the last mouthful, though I could still hear the buzz of con-

versation, which was carried on in a language unknown to me, but of which I fancied that I was the subject.

"Come, younker," said the old man, rousing me gently with the butt end of a whip; "time's up, and you must get up into the cart, for we're bound to be at the tents to-night, some way."

I woke half-scared, but with a comfortable sense of repletion. The grey horse was harnessed to the shafts of the cart, with the two donkeys for leaders. Rory Lee sat upon the front, smoking a long clay pipe and drinking from a stone bottle of ale, from which he gave me a small portion in a japanned tin measure. The gipsy woman was crouching under a canvas awning at the back, and helped to hoist me to the interior, where, before I once more fell asleep, I lay upon a thick horsecloth, and wondered at all the strange things — the baskets, kegs, bowls, tinware, twine, wickerwork, door-mats, rugs, rolling-pins, and candlesticks—which hung around me on all sides of that caravan.

CHAPTER III.

MARROWBONES AND CLEAVERS.

I MUST have slept long and feverishly, for though I had started broad awake twenty times, filled with mortal terror by some ugly dream, in which the events of the morning were mingled, I felt that the caravan was still jogging on over a rough road, and could hear the breathing of the gipsy woman, as she leaned back on a bundle of hay covered with a coarse blanket. It was broad moonlight, and the tinware that swung and clattered from the wooden roof above my head reflected the white beams which shone through the chinks and crevices or poured in at a little square window on the side opposite to that where I lay. I could make out that the old man, who was called Gaffer, had got upon the shaft, for I heard him talking to Rory Lee, and smelt the smoke from his pipe as it wafted past. It may have been this murmured talk, as well as the passage of the vehicle over a more even road, which lulled me at last into entire forgetfulness, for when, on the motion of the cart ceasing, I opened my eyes, it was quite daylight, and through the little opening I could see the grey clouds melting before the bright rays of the early sun.

I had no notion how far we had travelled or to what part of the country, though I remembered having passed amongst houses in the night, and had some recollection of awaking amidst a great clatter of hoofs and twinkling of lights, while the caravan stopped for a short time at a roadside tavern, where a coach was just starting. Now, however, we were again amidst brown fields and pastures, and, as we moved on afar, I ventured to peep out of the window, I could see that we were approaching a considerable extent of waste land, where the surface was all broken into irregular mounds and cavities, and yellow gorse, and thistles, and wild herbs sprung on knolls and in cavities, which looked as though they had been dug out for some purpose which was never accomplished.

Then came a few straggling trees and hollows of tangled grass and weed; then, at a sudden turn of the road, a thick chain of bush, through an opening in which a rough dog sprang, barking, followed by the sound of several voices greeting our arrival in a strange dialect, of which I could understand but little.

In the open space, which was a part of the same wild common, where the dark green of the herbage was vivid with patches of wild bloom, and sloped downwards into a smooth glade flecked with the shadows from the tall trees that overhung the roadway, there stood four or five vehicles of a rather less pretentious kind than that in which I stood looking through my peephole at the scene. Horses and donkeys of a sorry sort stood with hanging heads or

cropped the scanty grass at the edge of the glade, where they were tethered by ropes and thongs. From half a score of low tents, made of patched and dirty canvas, the rents in which were sometimes concealed by any spare piece of coarse stuff that could be used for the purpose, half-naked children crawled; while in the midst of the camp a fire like that which had cooked our dinner on the previous day was burning beneath a great iron pot. Men were lazily at work making clothes pegs, mending broken harness, patching old boots and shoes, or were idly smoking and growling at the women, some of whom were washing or knitting, while others fed the fire and spread a coarse cloth on the ground, on which they set out such mugs and basins as they could find. Some bread and a large mass of bacon were already provided for breakfast; and a couple of great black teapots stood ready for the boiling water.

The place was in the full bustle of a gipsy "pitch;" and, although there was little talking except in that low undertone in which those people speak amongst themselves, there was a great hammering and clicking and humming and clinking, suggestive of nobody having long to stay.

I speak of these things now, not so much as they affected me at the time, but in the light of my later experiences. Rather let me say that I put my vague childish impressions into words, which give them a more definite meaning than they took when I first experienced them.

At the time I had little leisure to reflect on what I

saw; for, before I had stood long at the little window, I felt the hand of Thyrza Lee gently pinching my leg, and, looking towards the back of the cart, saw that she was waiting for me to come down.

By the time I reached the opening in the hedge, whither the gipsy woman led me by the hand, I could see that our arrival, or, rather, the appearance of Rory Lee, had caused no little excitement. The smokers, the workers, the idlers, and some who had only just crawled from beneath the tents, and were but half-dressed, were alert in an instant; and a one-armed man, who had been engaged in trimming a number of short cudgels, still held and flourished the knife which he had been using, as he harangued the assembly with fierce and furious gestures.

There were about a dozen men and youths, but they were not all gipsies. I could see the difference between the russet-skinned, full-eyed, and fairer-haired portion of the company, who were wanderers like the rest and lived in tents, and worked at the same shifting trades, and the real gipsies, even though I had never before made the contrast. The one-armed man was more crisp-haired and sallow than even Thyrza Lee, and the others called him Bartho. He and about half the rest of the gipsy men, with the old women, were evidently angry, and I could make out that they threatened Rory, who stood quite immovable, showing his white teeth and darting back their fierce glances, and answering them in a way which seemed to irritate them still more, as though he knew their private histories, and retorted their anger with

sneering gibes. I knew afterwards that this was so, for I learnt enough of their language to recall something of what had been said that day, and was told the rest.

The colloquy began by the one-armed man leaping high in the air, flinging up his knife and catching it as it fell twirling to the ground.

"No turncoat shall crawl over me," he shrieked, almost foaming at the mouth, "or he will have Bartho to deal with. He shall be crushed like a gnat, or stung to death like a blowfly. Let him go back to the housefolk and leave the tents to us. Don't hear him, or the curse of the black famine cling to ——"

"Yah, Bartho! my conjuror! my hankey-pankey!" retorted Rory; "we are no chuckle-headed fair-goers, that you need rant at us; we all know how to curse here as well as you did when you left your arm in the iron ring near the custom-house wall at Gibraltar. If you are no better at black patter than at smuggling you won't frighten me. I'm no Spanish fly, and so put up your cheese-cutter!"

"Go back to the house-folk, and mix your blood with water," snarled one of the old women.

"Just as you mix your hell broth, and get into prison for pretending to cure warts, mother, eh? You know you're only puddle-blooded yourself, seeing that your grandmother was a Welsh pigwife, and your grandfather married her into the tribe to pay for a sow and farrow."

He turned swiftly from one to another as he answered them, his eyes gleaming, his spare, active

figure ready for any sudden attack; his long, light staff poised easily in his hand.

Some of the young fellows murmuring and incited by the one-armed man began to close round him, but he sprang lightly back, and with a dexterous twist brought the point of his staff inside the knee of the foremost and threw him down.

Another moment and there would have been a rush at him, but, before he had time to strike, the men fell back, all except Bartho, who stopped short at the place where he had stood playing with his long knife and muttering between his clenched teeth; though he looked mistrustfully from beneath his overhanging brows and wriggled the stump of his missing arm with a horrible menace.

Another figure appeared upon the scene of action. An aged, decrepid woman, who came out from a sort of square inclosure formed of blankets and horse-cloths, stretched upon poles like those that are used to support the lines used in drying clothes.

She supported her trembling limbs by means of a long crutch-stick, and as she was dressed in a long hooded cloak, all patched and stained with wear, little could be seen of her except a dark weasened face, thrust forward in order that she might peer before her, with a pair of eyes from which little of the fire of youth seemed to have died out.

I was very frightened, indeed, at the appearance of this old creature, for although I had already had some experience of all kinds of sordid and ugly old age amongst the female inmates of Grundon Union, I had

never seen one so apparently aged, and yet with such a strange vivid life and eager cunning in her shrivelled features. Two lads, of about my own size, led her along, and had evidently told her what was going forward; for, as she approached the group of men, and her eye rested on Bartho, she began to mumble and to shake her stick at him. Rory went to meet her, and, as she stood holding to his arm, I could see that he spoke to her in a low tone, and that she nodded her head even more than it nodded with weakness and the paralysis of old age. Then she held up her stick again, and beckoned all the men round her. These were followed by the women, who brought a rickety old wooden chair from somewhere that she might sit down in the midst of them. Thyrza Lee still stood with my hand in hers at some distance, and taking no part in a discussion of which she evidently knew the particulars already; and the old man who had been called Gaffer sat near us, still smoking his pipe, and mending an old willow basket with some wet osiers from a bundle slung at the bottom of the cart.

It was a strange wild sight; and I almost forgot my own forlorn condition and the personal interest I might have in the fierce discussion, while I watched these men and women gesticulating, and heard scraps of an unknown language mingled with words that were familiar to me. It was evident that the old crones who hovered about the group of which Rory Lee and the ancient woman now seated on the broken chair were the centre felt a keen delight in the recital which

Rory himself was giving, and I felt a strong desire to know what was the subject of their discussion.

Presently I heard the name of Fairhoe, at which a hoarse, subdued cry broke from the assembly, followed by a roar so fierce and threatening that it drowned the voice of the speaker. It was repeated presently, and a sudden movement in those who were standing round enabled me to see Rory Lee.

I could understand from his gestures that he was describing the murder, and as he went on the excitement of his auditors increased, although it was exhibited only in dumb show; the name of Harrick alone producing that same hoarse murmur, which had that in its tone that might have meant fifty murders.

There must have been something in the narrative which accorded with the temper of the gipsy Bartho, who, before it was ended, turned swiftly round, ran a few paces, and, with a sudden sideway swing of his one arm, sent that terrible knife of his quivering into the trunk of a tree four yards off.

"Bravo, Bartho, for a trick of Spain," said Rory, stopping in his discourse to let the maimed ruffian take his hand; after which they crossed their thumbs, and seemed by some secret sign to make a silent treaty of peace.

"You understand that none of ye know the name of Orwood," said Lee, "and that such a man as I have told ye of may come and go unquestioned. Now, come and see the lad, and then we'll talk over other matters."

They came round me so suddenly and swiftly that I clasped the hand of the gipsy woman with both mine in a paroxysm of terror; but their intentions were evidently not hostile, for one or other of them clapped me on the back, stooped down with their hands upon their knees to look into my face; and, finally, the ancient woman, hobbling from her chair, came, and, putting one skinny hand upon my head, stroked me down from crown to chin with the other taloned claw, as though she thereby made a sort of claim to me as her own property.

Her fingers had reached my chin, when she stopped suddenly, started, peered closely at me with that same gipsy stare that seemed to strive to penetrate my very eyes, and glanced swiftly round like some bird of prey. The men had drawn back and were talking together at a little distance, but as she looked she caught the eye of the woman who held me. A harsh, guttural chuckle broke from both; and the crone beckoned with her stick to two other women who were close by, and spoke to them in their unknown tongue.

One by one they came and fixed their basilisk gaze upon me; and, one by one, they turned to look at each other, and broke into the same dissonant laugh.

They had some choice secret amongst them of which I was the subject, and I suppose I expressed alarm in my looks, for Thyrza Lee, who still held me, said quite gently, and in that same singing wheedling tone which her male namesake had used the day before, "Don't be frightened, my pretty boy, the gipsy folk

will never harm you now you've been took into favour by their mother. That's our mother that stroked down your pretty face, my dear, and you shall live with us as long as Rory Lee's your friend. Him and me are brother and sister, and that's our mother, and we're able to take care of you, my dear; but we know more about you than Rory does, my pretty boy, and we can make your fortune if you stay with us, so don't you go to run away, or else you'll be found dead in the wood, and no kind gipsy to help you. Now you come with me and have some breakfast."

We had scarcely gone as far as the place where the loaves and bacon were laid, and she had only just filled me a mug of milk and water from a stone bottle, when a knot of the men following Rory came towards us, and, sitting down upon the grass, prepared for their own meal. "Come here, younker," said my strange friend, taking from his pocket a leathern purse, "you can read, can't ye?"

I said that I could.

"And all sorts o' readin', eh? They learn you such things at the big house yonder, don't they? Now just you come an' stand beside me and read this, so as all can hear. They'll believe you if they won't believe me; and I can only just spell about half of it."

He spread out a little roll of paper on his knee—a stained and crumpled sheet only as large as a leaf from a book—and pointed to each word with his slender brown finger as I went on reading it to the

end in a voice as audible as I could make it for the occasion.

Marriage solemnised in the Church of Saint Boniface the Martyr, in the Parish of Saint Grimes Wapshott, in the City of London.

Oct. 23, 18—.	Oswald Fairhoe Barbara Waine	Bachelor Spinster	Clerk —	Of Boniface Buildings Of Deerfoot Lane.	Both being of full age.

Married in the Church of Saint Boniface, in the parish aforesaid, according to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church, by me,

JOSHUA NORTHROPP, *Minister.*

In presence of us—

Peter Jenkin,
Rebecca Howls.

The above is a true copy of the register of marriage solemnised in the church and parish aforesaid, and extracted by me,

JOSHUA NORTHROPP, *Minister.*

This was the document to which those dark-visaged men and lads leaning on their elbows on the grass gave their utmost attention as they followed the motion of my lips with eager eyes. This was the document which I knew had been stained and crumpled in the clutch of that hand now lying cold and dead miles away, but within a bowshot of the house of that very Oswald Fairhoe whose name was greeted with a low murmur as I repeated it.

It was a great trial to me to find that even while I was eating my breakfast I was the centre of a score of fixed regards, and that I had no sooner finished than Thyrza Lee and the other women came up and stared at me, and went away, and chuckled as though they

considered this operation a kind of choice amusement. I noticed, too, that they always looked from me to Rory, and then, seeing that he was unconscious of the joke, laughed louder than ever amongst themselves; not that they ever got beyond a sort of cackling sound, as unlike real laughter as anything I had ever heard, though, goodness knows, I was but a poor judge of merriment, and had had little experience of it.

As the day wore on, and I strolled about among the tents, I grew a little more familiar with the people, and especially with Rory, whom at last I asked how long I should have to stay there, and ventured to hope that the ladies would not always stare and laugh at me so. I was scarcely prepared for what happened, when, after bidding me explain, I told him how the old, old woman had peered into my face, and how the rest had followed up that ceremony. He was leaning against a donkey, peeling the bark from a stick, when I mentioned it; and, with a sudden start, he whirled the stick into the air, and, falling on his knees before me, as he had done the day before, once more looked into my eyes. Then he sprang to his feet, and, seizing my hand, drew me away into the glade beneath the tall trees, and told me to repeat all my history. It didn't take long, for it was short enough, and there had been no change in it until the three days previous to that afternoon; but he seemed to listen eagerly.

When I had told him all he stood for some time looking at the ground, and then, holding me by the shoulder in a gripe that felt like a pair of pincers in my flesh, said, "Don't you never think of going away

from these people without me, Vally; there's a pretty lad. I can help you to find them that's been waiting for you this many a day, and you're better off here than ever you could be without me. You shall have a pony of your own if you'll only stay, and I'll learn you to ride and to be a gipsy gentleman, with gold rings in your ears, and to play tricks with cards, and to beat all the lads here at singlestick, and more than that. You'll stay now till I come back, will you, Vally? You swear it; say you swear it by the parson, and the church, and the book, and I'll believe you."

He was so excited, and I was so frightened that I may have sworn it by the strange oath he proposed for aught I know. At all events, he seemed satisfied; and as I knew not whither to go for a meal, or, indeed, which way to turn in case of my running away, and there was no lack of kindness and rough plenty there, I readily promised. That same night Rory Lee kissed me on both cheeks as I climbed into the tilt-cart to go to bed. He had made special arrangements for me to occupy one or other of the carts as my lodging, and he told me that he was going to London. As I fell asleep and heard the sound of the horse's hoofs trotting away I cried, for he had been one of my best friends, after all, and I dreaded parting with him.

I should fail to convey any distinct impression of the nature of the life I led, a stranger among strangers, a vagabond amidst wanderers, and yet under some kind of continued influence and guardianship which

seemed to be sufficient for my protection. Rory Lee was as good as his word, though I could never learn to love him; first, because there was something in his very blood, and in his half-savage nature which repelled me; and more, I think, because of the mystery with which he kept secret the motive on which he acted. That he had any love for me I greatly doubted. There were times, indeed, when I shrank from his glances as though I felt his hands upon me, and expected to feel the knife at my throat. But these moods passed away, and he would soften towards me strangely and suddenly without any apparent cause.

Those who have lived among the gipsies can tell what a wretched, sordid, often half-starved, and wholly makeshift life it is. A life of cold, and pain, and rheumatism, and beggary, even to those who have known no other; a life whose end is likely to be sudden death upon the highway or lingering sickness in the workhouse infirmary.

The gipsies have almost died out in England—they are dying out everywhere; but in England existence in tents and under trees has become impossible, the climate would have killed the tribes, apart from railways, unless they could have migrated like the swallows and wintered in the warmest parts of Spain.

I am digressing.

I moved about *amongst* these people, but not *of* them, and my days passed like a dream. Gipsies have no individual character to the casual observer. I am speaking of the true gipsy, whose characteristics

are those of the tribe, the race—that semi-Oriental remnant of a people to which he belongs. It is more difficult to discover a personal and distinct disposition in a gipsy than in a Hindoo, a Chinese, or a Malay; for the gipsy is a consummate actor; is always acting, until he loses individuality. There can be no doubt that their race is quite distinct from ours. I never felt at home for all those months of my strange boyhood; never was one in my poor thoughts or feelings with those lithe lads with whom I played or worked at peg-making, rode to horse-fairs, or camped upon some of the sheltered commons or breezy heaths in the way of our wandering business.

Take any "Egyptian" youth from the first company of the people which may cross your path, and you may know nearly as much of him as I did of my companions, except that they were ready to steal, to cheat, to quarrel, to fight; and that the slender code of morals that bound them amongst themselves had little reference to the outer world.

Of one thing I am certain, that what is called "fortune-telling" is not altogether pure invention. It was part of my business, with that of the other boys, to tell one or other of the women all that we had seen and heard in every place that we passed through. By artful inquiries, and hanging about tavern doors and the outbuildings of farms, by servants' gossip and old wives' tales, she must be an unworthy daughter of the tribe who cannot piece together some strange truths which may well startle their hearer. More than this, these people, men as well as women, have

a wonderful power—a fine, savage instinct, I believe it to be—of reading something of character and, it may often happen, of immediate destiny in those faces into which they gaze with those strange, staring eyes. Nobody who has ever met the true gipsy stare can easily forget it. It is as though the eyes took something out of your inmost knowledge into themselves, and did it in spite of you. I'm not sure that we have not some of us felt the same during the earnest regard of some animals, and that is why I have called the power a subtle instinct: part, perhaps, of a peculiar, physical condition transmitted through ages and preserved by a life amidst natural objects.

Not that the gipsy is susceptible to the influences or beauties of nature. I never could discover that he had a much higher notion of these things than that they, one way or another, affected his convenience; and I think awe and veneration are foreign to his character, if they have not been long lost for want of use.

It was this which separated me, a poor, untaught, workhouse foundling, from all those people to whom Rory Lee had expressed a wish to make me a "gipsy gentleman." They heard him, the men with a sneer, the women with a smile, as well they may have done; but they humoured him, for the men knew that he had influence with the tribes: the women discovered that he had found out the secret which made them look at me and laugh.

For a long time the sense of that mystery preyed upon me, and I even asked Rory to explain it; but he

said it was only a fancy, and that I should know one day. His visit to London was fruitless, for the people he had been to see were all abroad. I heard him tell his kinswoman so on the night of his return, when he asked me if I had ever heard at Grundon of a woman called Marion Rooke, or of a Doctor Letsom. I *had* heard of Dr. Letsom, for Weevil had told me how he had found out that Mr. Swiffle wasn't a proper doctor at all, but had only been a shopboy to a doctor in Grundon before he was sent for to physic the paupers in the Union.

Week after week my strange guardian went to London and returned from the fruitless errand, and week after week I was taught all that I could learn of the gipsy way of living.

It was, perhaps, the best training that I could have had at that time; for I grew stronger and taller, could ride as well as any of the lads who were my companions, could snare birds, catch fish, leap, wrestle, climb trees; and, though I had almost forgotten how to write, and my reading was confined to a few song-books which formed part of the wares in "Gaffer's" tilt-cart, and to which the gipsy women would listen until they had learnt them by heart and could sing them in their hard, metallic voices, I had lessons in singlestick and boxing from no less accomplished a professor than Rory Lee himself.

Of course, this only lasted long enough for me to acquire a merely rudimentary knowledge of those difficult arts, but I was learning more than these. I had a faculty of awe and sympathy with external things,

which was either absent or concealed in those with whom I lived.

Nature spoke to me, calling aloud or whispering gently, in tones that searched my heart, and which I yet could not clearly interpret, though they sometimes moved me to tears.

The life of the woods, the tender green of the soft uplands, the swelling slopes of mossy glades and forest nooks, the gorgeous scenery and grand pageants of the sky, the brawling of streams, the stir of that living breath of spring which, like the voice of God, calls strange creatures into being and whispers a living world from a dead husk, all these wonders found me and sank deep into my heart. Even the poor teaching of our hard-faced, gloomy master at Grundon Workhouse had been enough for this, for his teaching had a touch of gentle pity in it; his scared features lighted up sometimes with a ray of tenderness and of manly indignation against the cruelty and wrong which tried to leave a score of little hearts lonely and loveless in the world.

This was the education of the time during which I was a gipsy ward, and for this I was indebted to Nurse Purley, to the harsh master of our Grundon school, to Weevil, and to Liza—all of whom held a place in my regard that made the strange impenetrable companionship of my new acquaintances seem transitory and unreal.

We had moved from place to place, but had seldom visited any large town, keeping in the eastern and north-eastern part of England. The men came and

went; sometimes strange faces would come amongst us, and by the time that the winter was over, and spring burst fully out, our company had been a good deal changed.

I knew by this time that my presence with them had helped to supply our camp with more winter comforts than usually fall to the lot of such a community in the cold season. The pot was never empty, and there was warm clothing for all the women, as well as a store of blankets and such rough bedding as gipsies use; and this, with mild weather, had kept us all in clover. It was Rory who had furnished many of the good things as payment for the care bestowed upon me; and, as I now believe, that I might not be compelled to "take" such things as we might have needed. All the other boys were taught to steal—or, rather, they required no teaching. I might have done the same but for the memory of that other training, which still kept its hold upon me.

It was quite a warm spring evening, and we had pitched our tent on the borders of Epping Forest, near a place called High Beech. The men were sitting about smoking and preparing for the next day, when we were to be at Bow Fair. Bartho was at his old occupation of trimming short cudgels, the use of which I had learnt long before. They were for throwing at the pincushions and snuffboxes, and toy fruit and tawdry dolls and china images, which, set up on wands, made what were called cockshies, in memory of the cocks which were once tied to poles and pelted at as an amusement for Shrove Tuesday. The toys were

in a wallet at Bartho's side; the pot was boiling for supper; we were all expecting Rory Lee, who had promised to return from London in time to start with us next morning.

The place where we had encamped was a sort of platform behind the shoulder of a hill; rough heath and coarse, dry grass, with black binding roots, covered and interlaced the ground; bush and tree threw dark shadows, made more intense by the red glare of the wood fire. The talk was low, and the principal sounds that disturbed the silence were the cropping of the hay by horses' teeth and the swish of Batho's knife. Suddenly, another moving shadow fell upon the hillside; a swift but uncertain step was heard almost in our midst, and a man staggered towards the fire, where he knelt down, warming his bloodless hands, and looking fearfully behind him as though he dreaded pursuit. I remember giving a sudden cry as I saw the red light upon that white face—the same face which had not ceased to haunt my dreams; and, despite his haggard paleness, seemed to carry the brand of blood upon it—the face of the murderer of James Harrick.

A hand was upon my mouth almost before I had cried out,—the hand of Thyrza Lee. Bartho sprang up, and, going to the fire, squatted down opposite the stranger, waiting for him to speak; the rest of the men and boys stood up.

"Give me drink, somebody," gasped the visitor, with panting breath. "I've missed my way by miles, and have had neither bit nor sup."

Nobody spoke. Bartho brought a case-bottle and a tin mug, with a great slice of bread and meat; upon which the man began to eat like a famished hound.

He said, presently, "I've a message from one you know—from Rory Lee. He told me I should find you here."

We all gathered about him—myself amongst the rest, but keeping behind Bartho, who stood with his legs wide apart, looking hungrily, and with a sort of infernal relish, at the murderer, as though he could not see enough of him.

"He won't be here to-night, nor yet to-morrow," said the man, getting up slowly, and looking vaguely about him as he moved away. "He told me to tell Thyrza Lee—which is Thyrza Lee?"

"Here she is," said Bartho, pointing with his knife to the woman who stood beside him.

I could see the pale wretch shudder as the fire flashed on that bare blade. His hands trembled and moved about, as though he was groping in the dark, and he staggered away from the fire.

"I was to tell her that Rory Lee would not be back for four days. He asks you to stay about the fair field till he comes, and to take care of the little lad. That's all my message," he continued, looking round; and before anybody could stay him he turned, and, pressing his hat down upon his brows, strode away and was lost in the gathering gloom.

There was much whispering and talking. Bartho continued to look after him long after he had dis-

appeared, and then brought his teeth together with a snap, as though he had suddenly tasted the full flavour of the whole transaction. The next day we started for Bow Fair, where we were to meet another company, who had set up swings, let donkeys and ponies out to hire, and had already marked out a pitch where we could join them.

I may well forget some of the incidents of that journey, for they were soon to be obliterated by an event which separated me from them for ever. We had reached a great open space on the outskirts of the fair, and behind the booths, where the shouting and the beating of drums and gongs were deafening, when another sound, of which I could not guess the meaning, caused Bartho and the rest of the men of our party to spring to their baggage and suddenly arm themselves with such weapons as they could find by the aid of the two or three lanterns hanging to the carts. I asked what was the matter, but there was no time to answer me. A glare of links and torches suddenly appeared, moving swiftly towards us, and a confused mass of men and some few women, were being borne before those who carried these lights, fighting desperately as they went. The oaths, screams, cries, and passwords of the contending parties were drowned amidst a strange clatter like the tinkling of hammers on a hundred anvils; and as the flying, struggling crowd came on pell-mell towards us, I could see that the men who were driving the rest wore butcher's frocks, and that their rear ranks were armed with hatchets, on which they struck their cudgels with a

deafening din, to the cry of "Marrowbones and cleavers!"

The yielding crowd shouted too, and in the gipsy dialect. They were answered by a cheer which sounded like a yell, and in another moment our party was in the fray. I could see Bartho, with his big knife, darting to the front, and had turned to see what I could do. A long wooden fence stood just beyond the tents, and, with some of the men who had not yet joined the fight, I ran towards it, and began to pull out the rough pointed stakes of which it was made. They were terrible weapons, but I had no time to see what was their effect, for a fresh body of our blue-frocked assailants came up, and, attacking in the rear, cut me off both from my companions and from the tents where they had left the old women and the children.

CHAPTER IV.

I FALL AMONG THIEVES.

THERE was no time to hesitate. My companions stood at bay, and, with the pointed hedgestakes in their hands, waited for the rush. I heard a crush, a low howl of rage and execration, the crash of staves, and the hard breathing of men in a mortal conflict mixed with oaths and cries. Three or four of the blue-frocked ruffians, who still rattled on their cleavers with bones and cudgels, seemed to have discovered that I had something to do with the new weapons that had been found in the fence, and, separating themselves from the body of their companions, made a rush at me. I had caught up a long, rough, knotted piece of timber, small at one end, where it furnished a hand hold, and, as the first man came towards me, swung it with all my strength and caught him fairly under the chin. He swerved, staggered, and fell back, and in that moment I ran at full speed towards the booths, followed by a burly fellow armed with a great bone, which he flourished round his head. I was nimbler than he, and his heavy, thick boots prevented him from following me at first; but he gained upon me fast, and I could hear him panting close behind me as I reached the

back of a group of canvas and timber buildings forming part of the main area of the fair.

Without waiting for an instant, I dashed at a small opening where a tent-peg had been removed, and, scrambling through it, fell forward, in the dark, amidst a heap of shavings, sawdust, and general rubbish, through which I tried to scramble towards some outlet on the other side.

I was scarcely able to struggle forward, half double, for the ground was broken and uneven, and the dust raised by my sudden plunge and the movement of my feet nearly choked me. I found that I was crawling beneath a flooring of rough planks, on which there was such a stamping of feet in some place above that I feared it would come down and crush me. For a minute I lay quite still, in the hope of escaping from my pursuer; but I heard him presently cursing and coughing behind me, where he had managed to force himself through the space by which I had entered. Light was glimmering between the cracks of the boards over my head at a little distance, and I hurried forward on my hands and knees, feeling my way until I came to a wooden partition, behind which I could hear the sound of talking, and the hoarse cries and murmurs of the crowd outside, overpowered now and then by the banging of a drum and the shouts of a man who seemed to be standing just above me, calling the people to walk up and see something which was just going to begin; to support the real old English sport, and pay a penny towards the great set-to between the celebrated Nobby Blake and the Shropshire Novice.

I had learnt enough of what is called the "language of the ring" to understand the meaning of this appeal, and I conjectured that the place above where I stood was occupied by an exhibition of sparring or boxing; but I had no time to speculate further, for I heard my adversary advancing, and by the flickering gleams of the light overhead coming through the interstices of the floor could make out that he was feeling his way against the wall, which was a mere frame of timber covered with canvas. Another moment, and seeing an opening at the other end, where a corner of the tent fringe had been thrust aside, I plunged through it; slipped under a flight of wooden steps that led from the front of the platform to the ground, and was in the open air in a small space left by the crowd beneath the light of half a dozen oil or naphtha lamps that flared and sputtered just above me, and threw a strong glare upon the spot where I stood, not knowing which way to turn.

"Now then, don't hurry yourselves, but make haste," roared a voice on the top of the steps. "You that haven't got a penny get out of the way and make room for them that has. Lowlived karickters is charged twopence, an' respectable people a penny, to see the great set-to between Nobby Blake—that's me—and Fosky's novice, as is just now a taking of his refreshment down below; this 'll be followed by feats o' fancy and a great flare up of the whole prize ring, sparrin', wrestlin', fencin', small sword, and singlestick. Recklect the set-to's without gloves, and the first man that draws claret wins a belt o' the valley o' fifteen suf-

ferings, subscribed by a noble sportin' Markis an' his Ryle Highness the Duke of Summersault. Walk up, walk up, and don't say I told yer."

He was an active and lean, but a strong, well-knit man, dressed in the same costume as that of his companion, whom I had just seen, except that his cotton shirt was pink, and that his throat was enveloped in a woollen comforter. His head was of remarkable size, which, probably, accounted for his being called Nobby; and his nose had been broken at some former period, so that that feature could scarcely be distinguished by its prominence from his high cheek bones and overhanging brow. He was no beauty, and yet, as he concluded his address with a grin, there was something like rough kindliness in his face, grim and battered as it was. I had reason to think so afterwards; and that may be the cause of my believing that I thought so when I first saw it.

Several people from the crowd had responded to his invitation and stood just behind him, waiting for admission through a green baize curtain, where they paid their money; but my sudden appearance, all dusty and panting in the very core of that vivid glare of light, arrested their attention for a moment and elicited a shout from the crowd around the front of the booth. A yet louder shout arose at sight of the butcher, who presently came bursting through the same way, and, squeezing his huge form under the steps, still flourishing the bone in his hand, caught me before I could evade him, and twined his fingers in my hair. There was another yell, which drowned my cry

for help, and, though I struggled to get free, it would have gone hard with me but for the loss of three seconds during which my assailant shortened his grasp of that fearful weapon to enable him to bring it down upon my body.

Before he had raised it, a hoarse voice cried "Stop!" and he was confronted by Nobby Blake, who had leaped clear over the low railing in front of the platform and now stood before him.

"Burn yer carcass! what d'yer mean to do with the kid? Drop him, or I'll smash yer jaw!" said the champion; and a shout from the crowd, who had now an opportunity of seeing a real set-to for nothing, applauded his threat.

The butcher responded with furious passion, and requiring to know who his questioner was, again raised his hand to strike.

Thud! Down came his arm, and away went the ox-bone three yards off. After that, a little rubbing of the bruised member and gnashing of his teeth, during which the Nobby One moved me out of the way, and calmly waited his pleasure. He made a clumsy dash, thinking to bear down opposition by sheer weight and furious strength. Thud! Thud! He reeled back, staggered, came up more warily, and with considerable hesitation made another rush. Thud! Pressed closer, Thud! Aimed one tremendous blow which, had it reached the big head opposite to him, might have brought the battle to an untimely end; but before his fist had quite reached its aim—Thud! and down he went a throbbing heap amidst the dust.

I was the most interested person present, and a mere frightened boy just escaped from being murdered; but I had been leading a gipsy life, and had, perhaps, grown more self-possessed than such a boy at such an age would have been under different circumstances. At any rate, boxing—and scientific boxing, too—had been part of my juvenile education for the past six months, and almost a daily occupation. It may seem strange and unnatural, but when that final stroke sent the butcher down, I feebly cried, "Well done! well countered."

Nobby Blake turned upon me with an oath, but with his queer face distorted by a grin. "Hallo! my little bantam cock," said he, "what do you know about it? Here, come along o' me, or else you'll be made scarce afore long, I can tell ye. There's more o' them poleaxes about. You come up here," and, seizing me by the arm, he dragged me up the wooden steps towards the show.

The crowd began to close around the prostrate body of the butcher; but the men I had seen in the small inclosure beyond came out and kept them back while a pail of water was fetched and the blood washed off his face. They had just brought him back to a shuddering consciousness, when a tramp of footsteps was heard, and the crowd divided to let a dozen shiny-hatted men in blue tail-coats pass. I heard that they were policemen, but I had never seen a member of that force before. They handled their short, heavy truncheons deftly, for they were part of an Irish company told off for this particular duty.

"Here's another of 'em murthered entirely," said the first of the file, as he stopped at the prostrate butcher. "That makes three, if not four; and devil a gipsy to be found anyhow, barrin' the women an' the childer."

"Who got the best of it?" said one of the crowd.

"Ah, how would I know?" retorted the officer, surlily, as he and his fellows trampled back upon the toes of the front rank, and, twisting the half-recovered man on to his feet, led him away. "The marrybones an' cleavers has all gone off home wid their dead, and that's three if not four, and wid a knife stab in two of 'em as broad as yer two fingers; and the gipsy murtherers is gone off entirely, small blame to 'em; for the others is murtherers too, anyways, and it's time they got a taste of that same."

I thought of Bartho, and wondered whether any of the women would stay about the fair-field till next day.

There was such a number of candidates for admission to the sparring-booth after this episode, of which I was the cause, that both Nobby Blake and his friend the Novice had enough to do to collect the pennies.

"Here, young 'un, you must just stay here a bit, I can tell yer!" he said, with rough kindness. "An' here, let me whisper to yer, don't you have no conwersation with anybody but me an' the Novice; it ain't becos' we know people that's about here, that, likeways, you're to be on speakin' terms, d'ye see? Stow yer gab, that's the motter. Stow yer gab, d'ye hear?"

I said I heard, and would mind what he said.

"That's a good boy; an' if yer do I'll take you to London along of us, if you ain't got nowhere's to go to; but that's to be talked about arter business. Now you just peck a bit o' this here an' drink a drop out o' this here," he added, extracting a loaf and some boiled beef from a hat, and bringing a quart pot half full of beer from a corner under the cash-box; "an' look sharp, 'cos it's all in to begin, 'an you must keep alongside o' the ring, where I can see yer, 'cos I mean as you should earn your grub an' do what I tell yer, my little bantam."

"The ring" was a small circular space inclosed by low posts through the tops of which a rope ran. The ground was strewed with sawdust, and the seats for the spectators sloped upward almost to the canvas roof of the booth, which was lighted by a dozen or so of candles on a suspended hoop and by a few flaring lamps protected by metal reflectors. There was a great odour of fried fish, oranges, and other eatables, which were being consumed by the patrons of the entertainment; and, as every seat was filled, and a front row of the first comers squatted down at the very edge of the ring itself, where a man in velveteen, who was addressed as Brighton, and another with a sealskin cap, who responded to the name of Slopey, occupied the position of seconds, or, in pugilistic language, "bottle-holders," the atmosphere became less and less bearable every minute.

There were two or three of the fancy, or rather of aspirants and "novices," in reserve, who made their

appearance one after another and went through a variety of performances, which consisted mostly in beating each other about the body, either with boxing-gloves or sticks, in a manner beneath even my humble admiration. Then Nobby Blake and the Novice had a turn with the fencing foils; and, when the applause subsided, it was announced that the ring was open to all comers during an interval before their grand "set-to."

None of the company seemed inclined to volunteer; and, after waiting a moment, Blake came across the place to the corner where I stood, and, taking a small pair of gloves from a box, told me to strip off my jacket and go into the ring.

"It won't hurt you, younker," he said. "There's another chap o' yer own size, or not so big, as Novice is got hold on over there, an' you've only got to jest go on at each other for only a minute to get a laugh. Now, then, orf yer go!"

Off I went, indeed, anything but confident under the ironical cheer of the spectators, but not much afraid when I saw my antagonist who was pushed forward by the Novice, without a jacket, but with a peaked cap drawn down quite tight as far as his ears. He was a shambling, awkward sort of boy, rather shorter, but perhaps a little heavier than myself, with bent knees and a head thrust forward, as though he wished to bring everything at which he looked nearer within the range of a pair of small twinkling, dark eyes. There was something so simple and yet so shrewd and knowing in his face that I had almost began to laugh at

him even under those circumstances, when it suddenly struck me that I had seen him before.

My conjecture soon became certainty.

"Here, somebody, why don't you take a cove's cap off," he cried, in a voice that thrilled through me. "How'm I to get it orf, with a boxin'-glove on each hand?"

The Novice stepped forward, got the cap off with some effort, and by the process of turning it inside out, so that he seemed to be scalping his victim, and announced, "set-to by the game chickens!"

Seen him before? Yes, as he stood there, revolving his hands in what he supposed was a scientific manner, and waited for me to obey his injunction to "come on," my heart leaped up, my hands fell at my sides, and I cried out, "Weevil! Weevil! don't you know me?"

He changed colour, gasped, stepped forward, and tried to tear off the boxing-gloves, which were fastened to his wrists.

A derisive yell from the crowd startled us both; he turned round and yelled in return. "I ain't a goin' to fight," he called out; "he's too little for me, he is. You don't want a cove to go and be took up for manslaughter, do yer?"

This raised a laugh, and he turned and whispered to me, "If you come to London, as I s'pose you will—Liza's there—but you come to me first, any night arter nine, at the Haymarket corner by the opra. Can you remember that? Arter nine; corner by the opra, Haymarket. Good-bye! I shall make my lucky."

He picked up his cap, left the gloves with the Novice, and wriggled away into the crowd, and so out of my sight.

I stood there only half conscious of the shouts and yells that arose on all sides, until another competitor climbed over some of the seats at the back and came into the ring; he was a big and rather lubberly youth, with great fists, and a sleepy heavy face.

"He won't hurt you much if you get away from him, younker," said the Nobby One, as he crossed to take the gloves to the new comer. "Get away every time he goes to hit yer; d'ye hear? I won't let it last above five minutes."

As my opponent came on, and offered me his hand in the regular manner of the ring, I could see he knew something of what I have since heard called the art of self-defence. This generally means the art and the intention of knocking anybody to a jelly on any small provocation; and I fancied that the youth standing before me had seen that I knew something of the same accomplishment, for he eyed me over as I put up my guard and prepared for a tussle.

Another strange confession. I no sooner saw in him a probably obstinate antagonist, who really meant something, than my blood flew to my face, my nerves seemed to be clewed up, my lips went tightly together, my teeth clenched, and some animal instinct developed by that gipsy training roused itself within me to fight him with all my skill and strength. I don't justify the feeling; perhaps I should be ashamed of it; but it was there, and I felt a low kind of triumph as I

noticed the eye of Nobby Blake fixed on me with surprise.

"The young bantam," I heard him say, "where's he got it from?"

I am not going to describe the conflict; no blood was drawn, for we fought with gloves, and I was too young to hurt much, but too skilful to let my adversary hurt me. The details would be of no interest, and I entreat any fair reader who may be running through this chapter to skip at least two-thirds of it. We fought three rounds, and the last concluded with a trip, for which I had been famous even amidst the tents, and which sent my friend on to his back. Shouts of applause surrounded me, and a shower of copper money was tossed into the ring by the gratified crowd.

"Pick it up for the young un, Novice," said Blake, patting my head. "Blow'd if he shan't have half on it for hisself, and pay for his keep with the rest. Look here, lad, you pitch in along of us and your fortune's as good as made."

The money was fairly divided; and, when the exhibition terminated with the promised set-to, in which my new friends apparently knocked each other about savagely, without hurting each other in the least, I found myself the possessor of four and twopence in copper beside a fourpenny piece and sixpence.

"Who taught you all you know, and where do you come from, lad?" said Blake to me the next morning, after I had risen from the pile of mats and rugs that made my bed in a corner of the booth.

"Rory Lee," said I, almost without thinking.

"Whew!" whistled my questioner, staring at me with wide-open eyes. "We must have a jaw together, younker. If Rory Lee was only here now; but he's off, I know. He was to be back to-day, but that shine last night 's put the clapper on it. If you want to see him, you can't do better than stop here, mind yer."

"You know him, then, do you, sir?"

"I should think I did; and *sir* to you. We're pals, we are. Lookye here, you stay along o' me, and I'll be bound to see him in less than a week."

I did stay until the fair was over, by which time I had accumulated a fund of several shillings, and Nobby Blake was made acquainted with so much of my poor story as related to myself, only without mention of the event that led to my meeting with Rory Lee. On the third day after my "engagement" we started slowly for London, and I began to think of my meeting with Weevil, and how it was to be accomplished.

It was a cold, sloppy, drizzling afternoon as we travelled on in a caravan, a heavy cart following to carry the tent and some of the lighter timbers of the booth, the rest of which was to follow the next day. We made a slow journey enough, and none of us—that is to say, neither Blake nor the Novice, nor Mrs. Blake (a dishevelled woman whose acquaintance I had scarcely made), nor myself—were inclined to hurry the jaded horse; for we were all sleepy and depressed by fatigue and the influence of the weather, so that it was quite dark before we passed through London by Whitechapel, and, keeping a little out of the main streets, crawled on amongst comparatively deserted

ways towards the western end of the city. We had stopped two or three times to water the horse and to get some beer upon the road, and Mrs. Blake had made some tea, which I enjoyed vastly as I sat drinking it out of a yellow mug, and munching a great slice of new bread and butter. But we were all pretty sleepy now, and even the Novice, who drove, wrapped in an enormous drab greatcoat, was nodding over the reins. I think it must have been in a by-street, somewhere near St. Luke's, that we stopped suddenly at a dark archway, leading, as I inferred, to some stables, where Blake said we should put up the caravan for the night. Wherever the locality may have been, it was too dark to make sure of it at any after time from the imperfect glimpse to be caught by means of the one solitary lantern held up by a man under that black archway. All around was inky and impenetrable gloom; but I saw something by the flickering yellow light of that lantern which turned my blood cold and caused me to give an involuntary cry that was drowned in the clatter of the horses' feet and the creaking of the wheels.

I saw the face of the man who lighted us. *That* face again! The wan, horror-stricken, corpse-like visage that seemed now to be haunting me wherever I might come or go, and to have murder in its every lineament. I was alone in the cart, and as it creaked and rumbled under the arch I slipped out at the back and fled, by some blind impulse, as though I ran for my life.

Stopping after a time to recover breath, I found that I had neared a great thoroughfare, where lights flashed

in such of the splendid shops as had not yet been closed, and glistened on the wet pavement and in the puddles of the roadway. I clutched my money in my pocket, and pushed on until I heard a church clock strike nine. Then I asked some chance passenger the way to the Haymarket, and he directed me, looking with some wonder, I thought, at my scared, eager face and rapid pace. The shops were shutting one by one, and only at the porches of some large buildings the lights were bright—flashing upon carriages and falling on crowds of people gaily dressed, or on groups of squalid women and children. These were the theatres, and beyond them the streets seemed to get darker, until I inquired again and found that I was nearing my destination.

"The opera—yes, that was it," said a pieman with whom I stopped to spend a penny in exchange for his civility; "but, Lor' bless me, there was nobody there that night worth speaking of; it was the legitimate drama as draw'd nowadays, and the wery oyster-shops was nothing to Shakespeare. There was no good even for a crossin' at that corner, an' the young un as swep' it had gone lower down."

The first part of his information was unintelligible to me; but there was some meaning in the last remark.

In another minute, amidst the nearly deserted street, now lashed by the increasing rain, I saw a shambling lad in the middle of the road, leaning on a muddy besom, and before I could frame a greeting Weevil and I stood face to face.

I suppose there was nothing very extraordinary in my feeling for a moment as though the life of the past six months had been blotted out, and that I had only just taken that leap in the dark from the wall of the Grundon Union which had apparently changed all my destiny.

I don't remember what kind of greetings were interchanged, but I know that Weevil was soon conducted to the corner where the pieman still stood, and that he was heartily regaling himself on a "hot kidney" when it occurred to me to inquire where he lived.

"Well, that's just it, you see," he replied, with the steam from the luscious dainty coming out of the corners of his mouth as he stooped forward to keep the gravy from trickling down his neck, as it had already done down his jacket-sleeve. "I don't live nowheres reg'lar; but Liza she gives me a lift now an' then; an' when I can get there afore their shuttin'-up time I stow away under the back-kitchen stairs, where they keeps the coke. Such times as I makes a shillin' or so over I have a reg'lar fourpennorth in one o' the upstairs rooms, and pays for it. That's where Liza keeps my best suit, done up in a sheet o' brown paper; but I always leave my broom outside and have a bit of a sloosh at my hands and face afore I goes into a reg'lar bed. Oh! I aint done so bad, mind yer, one way or another. Liza, she lends me seven shillings to make a start out o' what her relations adwances for to get her a rig out o' clothes; but, bless you, they're reg'lar skinflints, I can tell you. I've been lucky, though. I come here a'most the first day as we got to London;

an' I'd been pretty used to sleepin' out by that time; so I went to bed under the Op'ra Collinade there. As I was a walkin' along here in the mornin', what should I see but a little child a comin' out of a shop-door and into the road where you see me just now, and in another minute I'm blest if she wouldn't ha' been run over by a carriage-an'-pair as was a tearin' down the street; but I ketches hold of her and chucks her on to the pavement, an' the wheel whizzes right close to my ear as I slips over a stone. I s'pose I must ha' been reglar faint with want o' grub and the cold step where I'd been asleep or something, for off I faints dead away; but the kid was safe enough, an' when I came to there I was a sittin' up in a chair in the shop and somebody a givin' me brandy out of a spoon. That's how I come to get that crossin' o' my own and nobody don't drive me out on it. In dry weather I makes out with warnuts or wallflowers, or what not, and sometimes does pretty tidy, and other times have to fall back on my savin's. I've got a couple o' pound put by in Liza's box now, mind yer, and I've earn't three-and-six to-day afore dark."

We were by this time on our way towards the "coffee-shop" where Liza had found a home with her relatives. It lay in a back street on the other side of Waterloo Bridge, a dark, sordid-looking street of mean houses, where even the insufficient flare of a couple of gas jets at the shop itself was a welcome indication of some attempt at comfort. There were but few people abroad on that drizzling night, and the trade of the place was nearly over; but in the middle of a dirty

room, divided by half a dozen rough deal compartments, furnished with benches, a pipe stove, fed with coke, gave out an intolerable heat, and on the top of it simmered a great tin boiler filled with muddy coffee, while in a little space divided by a half-swing door with a flat top two women and a man were busy washing cups and saucers and cutting thick slices of bread and butter.

"They're a gettin' ready for the mornin'," said Weevil, to whom I had related my own experiences as we came along, and who had spoken little until I came to the account of Rory Lee's guardianship, when he whistled in a meaning manner. "In the mornin', don't you see, there's so many bloaters, an' rashers, an' sassages, an' eggs, an' what not, that there ain't time to cut bread an' butter nor yet to make corfy. Twenty gallon a day they turn out, an' ten gallon o' tea. A reglar payin' concern, let me tell yer, at three a'pence a pint with moist an' twopence with lump; let alone muffins an' buttered toast, as all comes extra, same as creases."

Before we had finished our tea, Weevil nudged me, and I saw a tall, sallowish girl come out from behind the wooden partition. She looked weary and heavy-eyed, but I saw the same rugged kindness in her homely face that I remembered had shone upon me when I was a little pauper baby and she but a poor, slatternly workhouse drudge, herself not more than a child in years.

She would scarcely have known me, she said, but for my hair. My fair face had been browned by the wea-

ther and burnt by the sun, and I had grown slender and tall; but she passed her hard, rough hand over my curls with a touch that made me thrill with the memory of all the little love that my life had known.

Her sister had married the potman at a village inn where she had been barmaid and cook years before, and now their united savings were invested in this shop, where they all worked hard enough, but she harder than the other two in exchange for meat and drink and a very little money. She never went out, and our only chance of speaking to her would be at night after the business of the day was done. I could not understand that she had any hope before her, except the unceasing drudgery of a place in which she had no interest. So long as she was treated with decent kindness—and she was too valuable here for her relations to drive her away—she seemed to have no desire to change her lot; and yet I could see that she exercised the same influence over Weevil as she had done at Grundon, and that he was unaltered in the trust and affection that she so well deserved.

"We're goin' to be married one o' these days, Liza and me," he said, solemnly, when it was settled that I should stay there that night and set out in the morning, with Weevil, to seek what fortune London streets might afford for the present.

"We're only a waitin' for me to make a reg'lar livelihood, and then I shall be old enough, don't you see?"

She only grinned, and shook her head; but a tear fell on her thin, pale face.

"Don't you believe him, Vally: he's always a goin'

on with his nonsense; and there 's too much of chaff in him for him ever to get on."

"I didn't mean to, Liza, upon my say so," said Weevil, squeezing out two tears with a knuckle in each eye. "I'm always at it, I know; but hear what Vally's got to tell you. He wants advice, he does, and no mistake; so just you listen."

She was more astonished at what I had to tell than Weevil had been; for I think she cherished the memory of some of those wonderful greasy old romances which formed the chief amusement of Nurse Purley; and her sense of their truthfulness was shocked by my recital of the mode of life "under the greenwood tree." She was strongly in favour of my discovering Rory Lee, however; and, although no definite plan had been devised for that purpose, it was decided that I should endeavour to find out his whereabout.

I need not detail the particulars of my new life. It was the life of the London streets, and I had to endure most of the hardships that belong to the existence of the hundreds of lads who fight for daily food. I bought a broom, and made some effort to establish a crossing at a point in Oxford Street where the number of vehicles made the roadway perilous; but I had little success. Sometimes a stray penny found its way into my hand; but I was ashamed to beg, and the hand itself was too seldom held out to invoke that kind of charity which is only to be roused by exigent appeal. From the streets I went to the markets, and there I was better off in finding employment amongst the

salesmen and hucksters who had baskets to be minded or carts to be watched. I was at Covent Garden one evening with Weevil; we had both come together from the special lodging at the coffee-shop, for we had been successful the day before, and chose the luxury of a doubtfully comfortable bed to the really comfortable shelter of a waggon in one of the inn-yards of the Borough, where I had made acquaintance with the stable-keeper by volunteering to help clip a horse. It was a melancholy day, for Weevil had accepted the offer of a market-gardener, and was going to make his first attempt at regular service. He had offered me the reversion of his crossing, and I had joyfully accepted it, so that he went to speak to his patron on my behalf previous to our meeting in the evening, that I might begin my new business under his auspices. It was a strange, precarious existence; a wet, cold, hungry time altogether, and I often used to wonder whether I should ever be one of the horde of boys who hovered round the baskets and stalls seeing what they could steal. I think I prayed against the thought, I know I strove even against the fear, that I might drift into that condition; but I could see nothing before me but this shiftless life, and there might come a day when hunger would be too hard to bear, and when Weevil would no longer be there to share his penny with me for a loaf. I was very melancholy on this particular evening, for it seemed as though that state of things was coming nearer to me, and I was so overcome by the thought at last that I sat down on a basket in a quiet corner of the market and hid my face

in my hands. It was a corner near a tavern, just beside one of the pillars that supported the market roof; and while I was leaning forward, with my cap slouched over my eyes and tears trickling between my fingers, I heard a sound of talking in a voice which seemed familiar to me, though I could not tell to whom it belonged.

Looking up, I saw two men standing close to the pillar. I heard the same harsh tones repeated, and recognised Bartho, who stood there with a spare, grey-haired old gentleman, dressed in neat clothes, and with a strong face and a hooked nose, from each side of which an eye seemed to shine like that of some bird of prey.

Bartho had not improved since I had left him in the midst of the fray at Bow fair; a deep purple scar stretched across one side of his face, and the stump of his maimed arm wriggled more than ever.

"You know where to come to me, then?" said the older man in black.

"Yes; I shan't forget your name, Master Ralph Fairhoe," replied the gipsy. "It's not the name of a race that I like; but I hate them less than I do the fairweather dogs of my own people, who should drown with a hemp collar and a slung stone if I had my way."

"Hush! Don't speak so loud, and don't call people by their names."

"I had need hold my tongue if I called folk by their *right* names, for I should say too much for many of you. Come you to-night to the place I told you of,

and I will either have him you want, or put you on his track."

What I knew to be his hatred to Rory Lee overcame all discretion, if his mad temper ever left him any of that quality. I could see that the gentleman who was with him dreaded a scene, and had half-turned to walk away; and, remembering Weevil's advice, I took advantage of the situation, and creeping from my concealment, slunk off, and was soon going at a run towards the river side near the bridge of Westminster.

I had walked on to Lambeth before I stopped; whenever I found myself losing sight of the river, I sought it again, for the stream flowing onward, dark and silent, yet seemed like a living presence to me. While I was hesitating which way to turn on one of the occasions when I came to a cross-street, I saw a bright light issuing from a half-open gate, and, going towards it, found that it was a blacksmith's forge. Here was rare company, indeed, to come upon so late —a bright glowing furnace, burning showers of sparks, the merry clink of hammers; a strong glare of light and warmth, and two men busily at work, and singing as they beat their cheerful tune. I crept inside the gate, and crouched down, revelling in the warmth, the light, the sound, the human companionship. One of the men saw me and asked me what I wanted, to which I replied that I had walked a long way and wanted to rest a bit. He was a surly sort of fellow, and would have shut me out; but his companion, who was the master of the place, told him to let me alone, and, taking a rough lamp from the nail where it hung,

came to look at me. Whether this scrutiny satisfied him I don't know, but he told me I might sit down on a block of wood out of the draught of the door until they shut up for the night, and then they both went to work again.

I fell asleep in an instant, with the light, the fire, and the chinking mingling with my dreams; but I seemed only to have just closed my eyes when I was awakened by a hand laid roughly on my shoulder, and the journeyman told me that they were going to close for the night. They had already put out the lamp, and raked some of the embers from the fire. But I could see a third person there, a man in loose, old canvas clothes, and with what seemed to be a long pole in his hand. I could tell by his talk that he had come to have this implement, whatever it was, mended.

He went out, taking the way towards the river; and I, half asleep and stupid, finding myself put outside the door, followed him, without knowing why.

We had got down to the shore of the river where two or three rickety boats were drawn up amidst the ooze and mud, when, to my surprise and terror, the man turned suddenly round upon me, and before I could even call out, caught me by the throat.

"So you're set on to follow me, are you?" he muttered, with an oath; "but I'll just make sure on you; I'll——"

"What would you do with the boy?" said a deep harsh voice that seemed to come from the shadow of the boats lying on the shore. "Let him go his way,

as I go mine, and as you will go yours. Lay a hand on him again, even as I do now, and you shall have me to reckon with."

He touched me on the shoulder as he spoke, and I could feel him tremble. I trembled too, and, had it not been that shame was stronger than fear, I should have run away any whither from his dreadful presence. For I knew the gaunt, stooping body at once; saw the white, bloodless face which he turned upon my strange assailant. It was the man whom I had seen upon the bridge, the man whom I had seen scores of times in unquiet sleep; him whose name I had heard, and whose dread secret I had learnt—Orwood, the murderer of James Harrick.

And yet as he still kept his hand upon my shoulder and gently pushed me before him, I obeyed the impulse of gratitude instead of the dread that fell upon me, and we went away together.

"Whither go you?" he said, when we had gone a few paces.

"First to Bow, then to High Beech, then on to—— anywhere that I may find Rory Lee," I said, hesitating to mention Fairhoe, and shrinking a little as the thought of the wood recurred to me.

"Any will do for me," he said, dreamingly, "but I shall only bear you company as far as the forest. There are some who would do you a mischief, boy; and even Bartho means no good to you. You know me, do you?"

"I have seen you before in our pitch at High Beach, and—and I think once beside."

"Where was that?"

"In the City, at a stable where a caravan put up one night."

"See here, lad," he said, stopping and speaking with a sort of vague fierceness, "seek to see no more —never speak of me or greet me if we meet. So you can do me some service; and remember——no, no, I won't threaten. We will be fellow-travellers as far as the Beeches, and then, good-bye."

CHAPTER V.

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

THE morning had begun to break by the time we reached the City, and my flagging footsteps seemed to remind my companion that I needed rest. Not a word had passed between us since we left the bridge; we had tramped on, mostly through back streets, until we came to the wharves at Bankside, where heaps of rusty iron, timber, and all sorts of wood and metal lumber lay in melancholy confusion. Passing these, we crossed London Bridge without heeding the loiterers who stopped to stare after us, or the wretched, houseless wanderers sitting huddled together on the stone seats in the deep recesses, who moved and muttered as we came near them, and looked at us with haggard faces, shining white in the chill twilight of dawn, amidst what seemed to be heaps of rags.

Orwood strode on with the same intense look, the same unnoticing eyes that had made his pale face so dreadfully familiar to my dreams; but he had ceased to mutter and to clench his hands, one of which still held me lightly by the shoulder as we came to the foot of the bridge. I had, somehow, lost my first dread of him, and though I should have felt relieved if he had

suddenly turned away and left me to myself, I began to feel that to me at least he meant no harm. I was compelled to touch his hand presently, and ask him not to walk so fast, for I felt my strength failing, and one of my feet was galled and blistered.

An early coffee-stall had just been arranged by its proprietor on the paved space close to the stone steps leading down to the river, a stall where the customer had the choice of coffee or a beverage called saloop, now unknown even to London vagrants, but at that time eagerly sought after by those to whom the difference even of a halfpenny a cup was an object. I had become acquainted with this warm, smooth, and somewhat unctuous decoction in my Covent-garden experiences, and its fragrance was welcome to me, as I staggered towards the coping of the bridge, and leaned against it to recover myself.

The coffee-stall was provided with a short bench, on which favoured customers could sit and partake of the refreshment of thick bread and butter; and before I was aware of his intention my companion lifted me from the ground and carried me gently to this resting-place, where he pointed to the food arranged in a symmetrical stack upon a white cloth, and told me to eat some breakfast. There was something inexpressibly kind and even tender in his manner, though he seemed to try to make it morose, and to disclaim such poor companionship as might have been expressed in a word or two of comment upon the road, or the weather, or our mutual fatigue. I was surprised at his strength; for he carried me quite easily, and, though he was worn

and thin, no fatigue seemed to tell upon him. It was as though he was sustained by some unnatural force, that like a slow fire burnt out his life, and yet supplied a stimulus to his blood that enabled him to go on and on for ever. I could eat nothing; but I drank a cup of saloop eagerly, and, seeing that he had turned away and now stood looking vaguely at the river, went towards him, begging that he would come and have some breakfast. He started as I touched him on the arm and turned upon me almost fiercely, as though he had forgotten all outward things, and resented my recalling them; but, when he at last understood me, I thought I saw tears start in his bloodshot eyes, and, taking my hand in his, he sat down beside me at the stall, and ate and drank rapidly, and almost unconsciously, like a man who, having discovered that he was hungry, ate by mere instinct, but without enjoyment.

I slipped the price of our meal into the stall-keeper's hand before we rose to go away; but Orwood had not noticed it, and took out a small silk purse to pay him. The sight of that purse seemed to change his face for a moment; the fierce, haggard, hopeless look melted from it; the bleared eyes shone with a new light, the mouth relaxed, the whole body drooped humbly as though some strong, wilful devil had for an instant been cast out of it. After this momentary change, and when the former expression had returned to his features, in the midst of the strong shudder that shook him as he put back the purse into his breast, he spoke to me with a softened manner as he bade me lean on

his arm that I might walk to a place he knew of where I could sleep till noon.

This place was no other than the stables where I had seen him on the night when I ran away from the caravan—a deserted range of buildings behind a gateway, where two or three dilapidated vans and a light cart without wheels were laid up, waiting for repairs. A smith's or wheelwright's shop adjoined the shed where they were placed, but nobody was at work there, and the forge was unlighted; a rheumatic stableman clumped about the yard in a pair of wooden clogs, and seemed to be making a pretence of sweeping up a heap of stable-litter; but he only gave us a one-sided, nod and a muttered greeting as we entered, and responding with a brief "good-day!" Orwood opened one of the doors with the key that was already in the rusty padlock, and, pointing to a ladder against the wall, said that I should find clean hay and straw in the loft above.

I climbed the ladder which led to a space just above a long slit over the racks and mangers, where no horses now stood. I could hear a champing and a clatter of hoofs in an adjoining compartment; but I was too weary for this to keep me awake, and when my companion reappeared with two or three coarse, clean sacks and carefully covered me I fell into a deep sleep, although I knew that he had thrown himself upon the straw by my side.

I sat up amidst the straw, unable at first to remember where I was; but the light shone brightly through the single bull's eye pane of glass in the roof of the

loft, and showed me that Orwood was waiting for me. He had been out and brought in some food—bread and meat, with a jug of fresh water—and, now that I was awake, pointed to a tin bowl and a piece of soap in the corner of the loft, where a strip of coarse towelling hung upon a nail. I was glad to wash my face and hands, and to eat a little of the bread and meat; but the thought that had come to me on waking was still so strong that I looked up presently, and seeing that he also had eaten and had taken some of the water in a small cup that stood upon the shelf, asked him whether he knew Rory Lee, and if he could tell me how best to find him.

"I have seen a man of that name," he said, raising his eyes for a moment, and looking me steadily in the face; "but where he may be now I know not."

"You don't know whether any harm has come to him?" I said, cautiously. "Whether he is hurt, or sick, or dead?"

He looked, at the last word, as though he was about to speak; a new light came into his eyes that expressed neither hope, nor expectancy, nor relief, but something of all three; he checked himself, however, before he had uttered a word, and only shook his head.

"I know nothing of him," he said. "His way does not lie with mine."

"Where does your way lie?" I said, with one of those strangely venturesome, almost desperate, impulses which, I have since learnt, belong to words as well as deeds.

He stopped, with the cup of water half way to his lips, looked at me with a strange, stern, inquiring glance that made his haggard face resemble one of the stone heads that I had seen carved over the doorways of old fashioned houses. A grey paleness seemed to come upon it; a ruggedness, a look of purpose superseding the wild, vague, and yet terrible expression which had always seemed to belong to it, and which I had more than once associated with that of a hunted animal.

"I'll tell you," he said, in a strange, hollow voice, that was neither an ordinary tone nor a whisper, but was so low that he need scarcely have risen to throw a bundle of straw over the long slit in the floor above the mangers, and to close the trap over the aperture by which we had entered.

"I'll tell you," he resumed, sitting down and taking another draught of water, without removing his eyes from my face. "There is a man, a friend—well, perhaps not a friend, but a relation—of mine; he wanders here and there about the country, and everywhere he goes, if he only stays long enough, he thinks that people will find out his secret; and that there's something in his manner, or in his waking speech, or that there may be something in a word muttered in his sleep, that will tell it them. Then he leaves that place and goes to another, perhaps to come back in a day or two, perhaps to stay away for a week; but never for long together. All this time he feels that he must go one day to the place where—where—something happened. He's drawn to it ever, and has travelled round it, and

run away from it, and passed it, walking, walking, walking, just as you see a night moth flutter round a candle; and the time hasn't come yet, but he thinks it will come—knows it *must* come—when he shall go to that place. Now, wherever that man goes, I must go, to try to keep him out of danger, you understand—to keep him away from that still, lonely place where, if he goes, he will go like the moth to the candle; but where he must go one day as sure as there's a sun in heaven, or a star in the sky to light him there—where he would be drawn if the sun had been blotted out and the stars had vanished, and only the flames of fire that dance before his own eyes led him on and on till *they* lighted him there, and then left him in darkness till the end."

He had risen, and was standing with his hands clasped before him, looking as though he saw something far away, beyond the very walls of the loft; then, with a sudden shiver, which seemed to follow a strong convulsion in the effort to shake off some dreadful spell that bound him, he stooped down and whispered in my ear,—

"Boy, boy; I've told you this that I have told to no other living soul—see that you keep it here, and don't betray that man for your life." He touched me lightly on the breast as he spoke, and opening the trap again motioned to me to go down.

I had had a long rest, and we were able to walk at a good pace to Bow; but I noticed that my companion became more restless after he had passed the streets and houses that belong to London itself

and had entered on the open road looking towards the country.

I understood from the one or two slight observations that he made as we went along that he sought work in the various places to which he wandered; and though he asked me if I had money, and seemed willing to give me a trifle to help me on the journey, I could see that he had very little of his own.

We reached the place known as the fair-field early in the afternoon; but I could hear no tidings of any of the gipsies, though an old woman who kept a gingerbread stall outside a neighbouring tavern told me that some of them had gone on towards the forest, and she heard that they were bound to Brentwood, after spending a day or two at High Beech, where there was a great pleasure-van excursion on the day before.

I had observed that Orwood kept aloof from such stragglers as were lounging about the fair-field or gossiping at the tavern door; and when I rejoined him, at a little distance, he asked me if I was able to find my way to the forest alone. To confess the truth, I had no wish to go in his company; for his strange looks, and the still stranger confession that he had made in the morning, oppressed me with a vague sense of fear, such as I had never felt since I was a child in Grundon workhouse. I assured him that I could travel very well alone; and after regarding me steadily and earnestly for a moment, he took my hand between both his, pressed it hard, heaved a great sigh, as he said "Heaven keep you, boy!" and, turning sharply round, strode away, as though he strove to put a long distance

between himself and some influence that had power to draw him on the way that I myself was going. This was my thought as I stood for a minute looking after him until a bend in the road hid him from my sight; and then I went on, feeling alone in the world, but looking out for a shop at which to buy something for my supper.

A crowd of men and women were standing round the bar of the tavern on the high ground beyond the beeches, lights were moving about, and a great noise of shouting and singing showed that there were no lack of custom. As I plodded wearily along the road I was nearly ridden over by droves of donkeys returning from the open ground where their owners had been driving a profitable trade amongst the visitors; but they were in too much of a hurry (the drivers, not the donkeys) to answer my inquiries; and I determined to seek the information I needed at the house itself, where I sat down on one of the rough wooden benches outside the porch, and began to eat the coarse loaf and the wedge of cheese that I had brought from a chandler's shop, and where I at last lay down to sleep, unnoticed by the potman who came out to shut up the place.

It was a mizzling morning, one of those days in early June when the coming heat seems to melt the clouds and wrap the woods and fields in a veil of mist. As I shambled on, my worn boots sticking in the miry clay of the uneven footpaths, I began to dread what would become of me when my last penny should be spent. I already knew how hopeless it would be to seek work in a country place; and, indeed, what work

could I do? I could ride, groom, or even break a horse; but there was little chance of finding horses to ride or break. I thought of Fairhoe and of the strange accidents which were taking me back to that place and to Grundon, perhaps to enter the workhouse again as a pauper boy and to break stones in the blank, dreary yard there. I thought of Orwood, and of the destiny which led us both back to the neighbourhood of that crime, in which I seemed to have some part. I felt sick and faint, tried to whistle and to sing, felt in my pocket for my knife to cut a stick from the hedge and could not find it; finally, I buttoned my jacket, pulled my cap more firmly down, and strode on at the best pace of which I was capable, striving not to think at all, except of miles and milestones.

I cannot dwell upon that dreadful journey and all its details of hunger and physical suffering. I had never begged before, and I knew not how to ask for food; but, late in the day, coming to a place where there was a beershop, and seeing a man with a load of grains eating bread and cheese outside, I asked him for a piece. He stared at my strange figure, left off eating for a moment, and, perhaps, struck by the misery of my appearance, shut up his clasp-knife and gave me the remnant of his snack and the drop in the bottom of his pot of beer. I thanked him as well as I was able, and was moving away, when he asked me where I was going, and offered me a lift upon the road.

I fell into a sleep upon a coarse sack, over the warm, sweet smelling grains, and only awoke at a long, low

building, where he said I might, if I liked, sleep in the cart-shed, wrapped in a rick-cloth. He turned back after he had said good-night, and locked me in,—I suppose with an eye to the cloth. But I was still asleep when he came to release me in the morning; and did not wake till he had shaken me and put me outside the door. I went on till noon, but I could scarcely walk more than a mile an hour. Hunger had left me, but I felt a deadly faintness creep upon me, and stopped at a cottage door to ask a poor woman for a mug of water and a morsel of food. She looked at me pitifully enough, and gave me the water, with two or three cold potatoes that had been put by to fry for her husband's supper. "He must do on a slice of bread and cheese," she said.

There was a large house further down the road, and I asked her who lived there. She gave a queer kind of smile, and said that I should get little there if I tried, but that it was the parson's. Beyond the house was a thick wood skirting the road, and a broad gate opened on to a carriage-drive leading to the door. I was standing looking wistfully through the iron bars of this entrance at the well-kept lawn and garden before the great porch when a portly gentleman in black, with a white neck-cloth, tight cloth gaiters, and a broad-brimmed beaver hat, came up at a stately pace and rang the bell. I shrank back, but feeling instinctively that this was the master of the house, told him that I was sick and starving, and begged him to help me. He turned upon me suddenly, and, with his hand still upon the bell-handle, told me to begone or he would have me

put in gaol for a vagabond tramp. "There are hundreds of you about the country," he said, "and I believe that you are all thieves. As for starving, that's all nonsense. There's no need to starve in this country. Nobody can starve; it's against the law for anybody to starve; and, if anybody tells me that they are starving, I know that they mean they are idle vagabonds who will not work. He who shall not work neither shall he eat. Take care you are not seen here to-morrow morning, or I'll give you employment that you'll not relish, my lad," he said, as he passed in, quite red with anger.

I had not noticed a grey-haired, pale, gentle-looking lady, who must have been following him at some distance. I suppose she was his wife, and, perhaps, she had seen something in my pale, wretched face that reminded her of the child she might have had or of the child that she had lost. Whatever may have been the reason, she dropped a shilling at my feet as she went in, and the gate closed after her. I could have kneeled down upon the wet pathway to thank her. I think I did; but, at any rate, I went back to a shop that I had seen on the road and bought a little loaf and a slice of bacon and two eggs. These I took to a beershop further on, and, after some remonstrance from the landlord, was suffered to cook my dinner in the tap-room, where I sat and slept by the fire over the ale that I had paid for until, some company arriving, I received a hint to begone, and went out again with some heart to my journey.

I don't know what attracted me to the wood, but I

must have had some thoughts of passing the night there. The weather had cleared and the air was soft and balmy. The weak ale was in my weaker head, and I felt uncertain what to do. Pushing on past the house, I plunged at once into a by-path where the thicket seemed dense on each side, and went slowly over short velvety grass, almost oblivious of my forlorn condition. The evening was drawing in, and I had scarcely gone a hundred yards before I tripped over something that lay in my way across a slight ascent, and, as I fell, saw that the something was a familiar object—a springe, in which a rabbit had been caught and strangled. Why I should have thought it a prize I scarcely know, except that it was associated in my confused thoughts with food, and the means of living out another day; but at all events, I stooped, and, loosing the wire loop from the peg that held it, carried the rabbit by the neck.

I had scarcely emerged upon the path again when I felt a hand and a full-sized set of knuckles in my own neck, while a voice said, "Here y'ar, William, I thought as we should have one on 'em at last."

I was stupefied. A numbness seized my limbs and made any attempt either at flight or resistance as impossible as it would have been useless. The ground seemed to slide away from under my feet, surrounding objects faded in the evening haze, and I should have fallen but for the hand that was still twisted into the collar of my shirt, and the knee that was applied to my back.

I looked round bewildered, and perhaps with some-

thing of that feeling with which a drowning man is said to gaze from sea to sky towards the distant or the unseen shore. But in that glance I saw what the two men who held me did *not* see—a face watching us from behind a clump of young trees on the slope of the knoll where I had picked up the rabbit; a dark face, with black hair and shallow, shining eyes, a face that might have been familiar to me six months before, but of which I remembered nothing now—a young gipsy face, and therefore not easily distinguished from others like it.

A sudden thought struck me. If there were really a number of the people near and Rory Lee amongst them, they might try to rescue me.

"My name's Valentine Day, and I am on the road to find some friends of mine," I said, with all the breath that I could spare.

"We don't want to know yer name yet awhile, yer young cub," retorted the surliest of the two men, who gave his knuckles an extra twist by way of emphasis; "but jest you pint out where we can come across them friends o' yourn, and then we'll say something to yer. We've spiled their suppers as you come to look arter, and we'll spile them, too, if we gets scent on 'em."

"You jest tell us where we can come across the rest, and then you needn't say no more to commit yourself not till you go up to the justice to-morrer," added the other constable, a little more kindly.

"Wotever you say will be took down aginst you, and so if you've got anythink to tell us, out with it,"

said the other. "Where's the rest on 'em? There's a couple o' keepers on the look out I can tell yer, and they won't spare powder an' shot if the others rides rusty."

"There are no others," I said, faintly; "I was quite alone, and I've walked alone all day pretty well all the way from London."

"What! in one day?"

"No; in four days, and I was starving most of the time, and I came into this wood to sleep, and picked up this rabbit where it had been wired."

"You can tell that to the justices to morrer, and as one on 'em's Parson Bawleigh, and you're on his land, he'll commit yer for trespass, if yer get off the other score."

"I didn't know I was trespassing. There's no board up."

"Board up: Listen to that now, Ben! So we're to have boards put up, like milestones, to say please don't come in here to cut down our trees, nor yet to steal our game. Here, jest you ketch hold o' the young varmint an' trot him off to the station. I'm a goin' round by the Lion to see whether I can pick up anythink about 'em."

"You'll maybe pick up a pint o' ale or a drain o' rum," retorted the other, laughing as he took me by the arm and led me away. "Don't you talk too much, youngster," he said, kindly, as we got into the road again, "but jest tell the truth to-morrow before the justices, and I'll say exact how we found yer; if the Parson ain't settin' there's a chance for yer, but if he

is, there's plenty o' law, if there aint much gospel. You're a bit hungry, I'll bet a penny, aint you."

I said that I was rather hungry, but that I'd had a shilling given me, and had still fivepence left.

"Then you let me have it and I'll get you some supper to-night and a breakfast in the mornin' to keep yer sperret up. Can you sleep on the floor? I s'pose you aint partickler, and I've got an old great-coat somewheres as may serve to wrop round yer."

He said no more as we plodded along the road until we came to the outlying street of the town, along which some market people were returning from the main thoroughfare. There he took my arm under his own, and hurried along, regardless of the remarks of such of the passers-by as were either jocose or inquisitive on the subject of my offence against the law.

Turning sharply round a dark corner and past one or two beershops, where a few loiterers stood drinking, we came upon a low archway, lighted by the glare from a bull's-eye glass in the uppermost part of the door, at which my conductor knocked, and immediately on its being opened pushed me in before him.

It was a dark bare room; but a dusty fire was burning in a grate in one corner, where a man sat in a windsor chair, reading a dirty newspaper by the light of a flaring oil-lamp. I could see that he was dressed in the same way as my captors, but a white stripe upon his arm showed that he was their superior.

"What's in the wind now, Bashford?" said he, as we stood before the low wooden partition that divided the half of the room containing the door from the half

containing the fire: "robbing the market stalls, I s'pose, eh?"

"Well, sir, wuss than that, if the charge is to be took, as Cubber will have it. We come upon this young lad in Bawleigh Wood, not fur from the hall, with a rabbit in his hand as he'd just took out of a springe. Whether he'd set the wire, or no, I can't say: he says no. I say I think it aint likely——"

"Stop there, Bashford; what the devil have you got to do with whether it's likely or not? You aint judge and jury, are you? You'll be no good for a constable if you stop to think what *is* or what aint likely. Nothink's likely, and everythink's likely, when there's anybody to take into custody. Now, what's the charge?"

"Found with a rabbit as had been caught in a snare in Bawleigh Wood. Took up for trespass an' on suspicion o' poachin' an' bein' in league with the poachers an' thieves as has been a hankerin' about the place accordin' to the Reverend Mr. Bawleigh, Justice of the Peace's instructions in that case made and purwided," replied Bashford, in a voice that sounded as though he had come up there to repeat a lesson.

The other constable went to a common deal table, took out a square leather-covered book, an inkstand, and a pen, made an entry; and then, only turning to say "Put him in Number Three, and just see after him, will you?" went back to his arm-chair, and resumed his newspaper at the place where he had folded it down.

Mr. Bashford took me gently by the arm, and, open-

ing the door in the partition, conducted me into a dark, narrow passage, wherein three other doors, each marked with a white number, represented the cells.

"Look'ee here, youngster," he said, as he unlocked the last of these with a key that he took down from a hook in the wall, "you jest keep quiet, and go to sleep as soon as you can. I'll bring you a coat to wrop yerself up in, and a bit o' somethink to eat, presently. All you've got to do is to tell the truth, and then—why, then nobody, not even Parson Bawleigh, can't hurt yer in the long run." The place into which I walked, with the mechanical compliance of stupid despair, was a bare, white-washed room, with brick walls and a tiled floor. A small, square swing window, furnished with iron bars, occupied a niche near the ceiling at one end; but I should have seen nothing if Mr. Bashford had not brought a dim oil-lamp in a thick glass lantern, which he left behind him when he bade me wait a minute till his return. By this I made out that the place was without any other furniture than a broad, low wooden bench, at one end of which a small round block was fastened. This was to be my bed, the block my pillow; and I was wondering how I should put my head upon it without dreaming that I was that King of England, of whose martyrdom I had read in the Prayer-book and elsewhere, while I was under the care of the Grundon schoolmaster, when I heard the key grate in the lock, and Mr. Bashford came back with the coat. It was a thick ample covering, and the collar came so conveniently over the wooden pillar, that it left nothing to be desired, except permission to

cut off a couple of great horn buttons that would get just under my ear. While I was adjusting these, my kind gaoler produced a small tin mug and a tin plate. "Mind, it's all aginst the rules, you know," he said; "but I can't get no coffee nor yet no milk at this time o' night, and so this is warm ale; and here's a couple o' slices o' bread-an'-butter, cut pretty thick. I expects you'll just be quiet arter this, or else I shall get into trouble; but I shan't be far off for an hour or so. Now, you jest pitch into this here, an' then get off to sleep; an' don't you tell no lies, and then no hurt won't come to you—not from Parson Bawleigh nor nobody."

The justice-room to which I was taken next morning between the two policemen, much to the edification of a crowd of idlers who followed us through the two or three narrow streets that lay between the station-house and the town-hall, was situated in a wing of the latter building, furnished with a separate entrance up a flight of dirty stone steps, leading to a square lobby, where two or three officers were making an ineffectual attempt to keep out the public, represented by a dozen or so of general hangers-on, who seemed to come there in the hope of finding some entertainment with which to pass the morning. We had not to push through the knot of people waiting for admission to the court, some of whom seemed to have business there, but entered by an iron gate in a side passage, at the end of which was a small bare room, supplied with one dirty form for the accommodation of prisoners, and a square deal table and two chairs

for the benefit of those policemen or attorneys who were concerned with the cases to be tried. I noted all this in a vague sort of way, as I stumbled down the step at the end of the passage, and was held up by the officer who kept the door. I think I noticed nothing afterwards, except that there was only one other prisoner, sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, at one end of the form, which he tilted every now and then for the amusement of letting it down again with a crash, to the intense disgust and annoyance of the policeman who had him in charge.

"Now, then, first charge on the sheet—small charges first. Valentine Day; whose case is that?" said a sharp-voiced man, coming in from the other side of the room, through what I had thought was a cupboard. "Look sharp, for there's a justice's dinner to-day, and there'll be no time to lose. Cubber—Bashford—bring him along."

The two officers with me between them, followed him to the end of a short passage into a space in a large panelled room, divided by an iron railing, behind which such of the general public as could find standing-room had already assembled, while at the other end, at a big table supporting three desks, three large inkstands, and three sheaves of quill pens, sat three awful beings in glossy clothes and spotless linen.

Mr. Bawleigh, the clergyman at whose gate I had stood the day before, hesitating to ask for help in my great need, occupied the seat in the middle. He was a portly—a full-bodied, beeswing, fruity—portly—gentleman, with a fringe of white hair shading a rather

purple-tinted face; a voluminous pure white neck-cloth, and a great gold ring upon the finger of the right hand. I noticed this ring as he looked at me and dipped his pen into the ink-stand; perhaps he saw my glance rest upon it, for he stopped half-way to the paper he was about to write upon and whispered something to the gentleman on his left—a rather spare, bald, crop-headed, grey gentleman, with a long chin, and a look that, in combination with a habit he had of folding his hands before him, seemed to mean that he should find out something presently to your disadvantage, and could well afford to wait and keep you in suspense as to what the something might be. I should think (of course these remarks are founded rather on my recollections of the appearance of these men, than on my thoughts at the time; for a mere lad, almost a child, has impressions which he can only translate into thoughts long afterwards), I should think that gentleman enjoyed the justice-room, and would have been dissatisfied when he was unable to convict a prisoner of a couple of misdemeanors, or a brace of crimes at least. He seemed to have a stealthy relish for his office, and I fancy that, in a lower sphere, he would have been one of those men who might have volunteered to do the hangman's business in a case of emergency.

The other justice, sitting on the right of Mr. Bawleigh, was a bearded, wild-looking man, with iron-grey hair, all rumpled and tossed about his head. He sat gnawing the feather of a pen, and seemed ill at ease. As he saw me brought in, he looked at me for a

moment with a pair of rather restless, bloodshot eyes, and then fell to gnawing his pen harder than ever. I was regarding him hopefully, when Mr. Bawleigh's sonorous voice recalled me to myself, or, I should rather say, drove me back into that hopeless, dull confusion, from which I had only just emerged.

"Why, officer, I think I already know something of this prisoner. He was certainly prowling about my house last night, or rather, yesterday afternoon. I saw him at the gate, watching, as though he waited to see how he might best get in. When did you take him in custody?"

Here the sharp-voiced official came foward and volubly administered the oath to Mr. Cubber, while a clerk, who sat at a desk by himself in a corner, began to write very fast.

I scarcely heard what Mr. Cubber had to say. I was listening to the scratching of that pen upon the paper; it seemed to be whistling a tune; it seemed to be whispering something which I strove to catch, but which was drowned by the voice of the constable. At last it seemed to drown every other sound in the room, though I was conscious that Mr. Bashford was giving his evidence, too, as much in my favour as possible, and that the justice stopped him, by saying that, of course, he could only confirm the last witness.

I heard all this, and yet my attention was wandering in that hopeless dulness of which I have spoken, the pen on the paper whistling louder than ever against a bird which had perched on the window-sill outside, when I was awakened by a touch on the arm, and

heard Mr. Justice Bawleigh asking me what I had to say for myself. He must have asked me the question before; for he looked very red and angry, and spoke in a loud voice as he leaned a little forward in his chair to look at me. What could I say?

I had come all the way from London, with only three shillings in my pocket.

"Oh, indeed! Where might I have got the three shillings now?" from the long-chinned gentleman.

I had earned them.

"And that was the last work I did, and I had run away from it because I preferred not to work, eh?" from Mr. Bawleigh.

I had come to look for my friends, because I could not find work to live by in London, and was afraid of getting into bad company.

"Oh, indeed! He! he! he! Quite a virtuous character, really, running away from temptation!"

And where had I slept upon the road?

On a bench at High Beech, in a hedge, in a cart-shed—evidently a vagabond; rogue and vagabond, if no worse; clear case that, eh, gentlemen?

Here the rough-haired, bearded gentleman leaned towards Mr. Bawleigh, and, I thought, remonstrated in my favour. Both the other justices laughed, shook their heads and frowned. Mr. Bawleigh said, "Nonsense. Pray don't; pray don't let us have sentiment, Mr. Denzil;" and the examination went on.

My friends were—where? I didn't know. I thought they were further on the road—perhaps at Fairhoe. What did I mean? Were they travelling then? Oh!

they were tramps, were they? Not tramps. What were they, then?

I relapsed into silence, felt that I was floundering deeper and deeper into confusion; stood still, staring straight before me at the representative of law and gospel; saw his face flush, heard his voice booming and buzzing; but made out no word of its meaning until he paused suddenly, and added, "Not a day less. I should say this sort of thing wants an example; and so——" here he conferred for a moment with the long chin, which nodded compliance; and with Mr. Denzil, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and began to eat a fresh pen—"and therefore the court agrees that you be sent to prison for a rogue and vagabond; and I hope that the leniency of the sentence may be a warning to you of what punishment you are likely to incur for the next offence."

I heard, as I have already said, very imperfectly: there was a buzzing in the room or in my ears which seemed to drown the whistling of the pen, though I still heard it going to some sort of tune. The voice of Mr. Bawleigh sounded as though it came from the middle of his waistcoat. I could not hear, but I could see; and as Mr. Bashford put his hand upon my shoulder to lead me away, I caught a glimpse of a woman's face amongst the crowd—a face that I should have known anywhere — that of Thyrza Lee. I stretched out my hand to her, called her by her name; but she had gone already—slipped behind the crowd, and vanished in an instant, as I was dragged out by the side entrance, and placed upon a seat in the wait-

ing-room. The forms and ceremonies necessary for my transfer to the county prison occupied some time, during which the other prisoner, who had been taken into the room immediately after me, was tried, convicted, found guilty of a common assault, and with being drunk on the highway, had the option of fine or imprisonment, and was ultimately discharged. All this I learnt from Mr. Bashford, who kept guard over me in case of any desperate attempt at escape; but who, I am convinced, believed that I was innocent, for which I felt sincerely grateful to him, though when I put the question he only shook his head, and remarked that the least said was the soonest mended; and that all trials had an end if we only waited long enough.

The end of those that took place that morning was announced by the retirement of the justices to dinner, and the consequent bustle and excitement in front of the building, at the back of which I was quietly slipped into a sort of black covered van, like a baker's cart enlarged and re-varnished for a funeral.

It was a strange sensation to know that I was locked in, and that the door at the back where I had entered to find a little round seat with iron arms to hold on by, and a window at the top for ventilation, would not open again till another larger door yawned before me. It was still more strange to feel that all that showy justice should have been put in force to punish me for my misfortunes, and that a homeless, friendless lad, not consciously a rogue, and most unwillingly a vagabond, should be the only prisoner—the one solitary

result of the morning's labour of the three great beings who represented the majesty of the law.

I felt that there was something strange, and wondered confusedly how it had all happened; found myself going off into fancies quite foreign to the subject; woke up from them and thought I must have been asleep; felt the van turn a sharp corner, crunch over gravel, jolt across a paved roadway, and then saw the door open, and was hauled down the iron steps, to find myself behind a great gate all studded with clamps, and bolts, and nails. I was in the courtyard of the prison, the front of which I remembered having seen when I was free; a front decorated with sculptured chains and fetters, but otherwise neat and not very forbidding in its appearance. Even this courtyard was a more cheerful place than the area in front of the wards at Grundon workhouse; and when a tight blue warder motioned me with a bright new key into an office like an overgrown glass cucumber frame, that I might be formally transferred from Mr. Bashford to the head gaoler, who on such occasions represented the governor, I felt almost resigned to my fate. In truth, I had run down the entire gamut of suffering, and now there only remained one confused monotone of painless indifference—the low hum of physical weariness, with ever so slight a variation of mere curiosity. As I stood there, waiting while the tight blue warder made out some necessary form ready for the signature of his superior, I fell into a kind of stupor, composed of sleep and faintness—the sort of sleep from which people strive to shake them-

selves free, lest they may never more awake in this world. I was making that effort when some one came in at the door. Mr. Bashford touched his hat, the tight blue warder made room at the desk, and I, looking up with some slight awakening of interest, held out my hands with a sudden gesture of appeal, and cried out, "Sir! sir! Oh, Mr. Scarthey, don't believe it! don't believe it!"

I have said that I was friendless and homeless, and yet in the head gaoler I recognised my oldest friend, the schoolmaster of the union at Grundon.

He turned, looked at me inquiringly for a moment, and then, with his old stern, rugged manner—seeming only to be lighted by a mere ray of recognition—said, "Be quiet, lad, be quiet; I will hear what you have to say presently."

No other word passed. The paper torn from the book was given to Mr. Bashford, who bade me good-bye, for which I was very grateful to him, and turned back again to tell me to be a good lad and listen to what the chaplain might have to say to me.

Then I was consigned to the care of the tight-blue warder, who, if I had been a mere piece of mechanism or a species of wheelbarrow, could scarcely have guided or trundled me more systematically along a paved pathway into the main building of the gaol; here we turned into a corridor at the side, twisted round a corner, entered a narrow lime-whited stone passage, containing a row of painted iron doors. Stopping to open the last of the series with his universal key, my guide touched me on the shoulder, said, "I shouldn't

wonder but head gaoler comes and gives you a look in half an hour or so, else he wouldn't a told me to put you in here—best cell in this corridor."

Before I could reply, I was standing amidst the four white walls of a small room, lighted by a high grated window. There was a bright copper basin in one corner, supplied by a bright copper tap, and in the walls on each side two bright copper hooks. A neat canvas bundle lay upon the floor in a corner, just under a white deal shelf, on which lay a bright tin mug, a bright tin plate, a bright tin spoon, and a dark-leather-covered Bible. I did not know it then; but ——ford gaol was an experimental prison. A philosopher named Bentham had been for years at work on the subject of model prisons, and, though his system had rather broken down, many of its details were undergoing a trial. The new system had found its way down here, and with my hasty notions, derived goodness knows whence, on the subject of gaols and their inmates, I stood in mute astonishment at the spotless hopeless walls and the burnished metal of this clean, airy room. Then there came a sharp click, and where the door had been, the wall seemed to have closed into a solid piece, with only one chink, too narrow to admit even a ray of light. I sprang towards it with a sob of terror; the place, so airy only a moment before, became close and choking; the space appeared to contract, and the blank, white, pitiless place to become smaller, although its four unbroken surfaces had no point for the eye to rest upon in that glare of light. I strove to find some cranny—a key-

hole, a nail-hole, where I might place my eye, if only to see the corridor outside; but there was none—not even a scratch upon the smooth plaster or the even floor—sufficient to relieve the dread sense of utter loneliness; not a sound to break the awful stillness that seemed to cut off human companionship with that last sharp click of the closing door. I turned faint, and, plucking at my shirt to free my throat, that I might breathe more freely, stumbled towards the canvas bundle in the corner, and fell upon my face, covering my eyes with my hands.

CHAPTER VI.

PEACE AND QUIET.

I DO not know how long I lay there; but when at last I felt a hand trying to raise my head, and scrambled on to my feet, I could see nothing. It was not dark, but everything seemed blurred and dim from the pressure of my knuckles upon my eyes, and the scanty but scalding tears that blinded me. I should have fallen again but for the same hand, which caught me by the shoulder, and an arm that held me gently while I recovered myself. Then the mist began to clear away a little. I saw the white, staring walls, the highly-burnished copper fittings of my cell, and looking up at the high grated window, through which a slanting bar of yellow light fell upon the unbroken floor, noticed that my prison door stood half open, and that the rugged face and gaunt figure of Mr. Scarthey were bending over me, not without an expression of pity and commiseration.

"Don't speak yet, my boy," he said; "wait a little, and get your breath. Now stand still here against the wall while I draw you a mug of water. Are you hungry?"

"No, not very," I said, in a voice faint enough to

surprise even myself; "but don't you know me? don't you remember me, Mr. Scarthey?—Valentine Day, you know, that was your scholar in the house—Grundon, sir. I ran away, but I couldn't help it:" and I held out my hands to him imploringly, for I had seen no recognition in his eyes as he stooped to look at me.

Now, however, he stood with dismay upon his face, and I could see his mouth contract, as though he had been struck with some sudden pain.

"What brings you here, boy? You should never have run away when you did; though, God help you, I don't see what else you could have done. I ran away myself, and came here, where I shouldn't have to see daily and hourly cruelty to innocent people, and where I thought I might bring some of the lessons I had learnt even to the guilty. I left the prison for the workhouse, and they took me because they thought I had been hardened by my contact with the walls of a gaol; now I come back to a gaol, softened by being beaten against the bars of that accursed place."

I told him everything except the occasion of my meeting with Rory Lee; for I was still afraid to mention anything about the murder in the wood, and respected the vow which the gipsy had extorted from me. Besides this, I fancied I could see the pale face and feel the long sinewy fingers of Orwood; not that I believed he would do me any mischief; but I had a vague terror of him—an impression that I should meet him again somewhere.

Mr. Scarthey sat quite still after I had finished speaking, his head resting on his hand as he con-

tinued to look at me, his thoughts evidently busy with some conjecture of which I was the subject.

"Did this gipsy never tell you who were the people he wanted to take you to in London?" he asked, presently. "Did he never mention a name, or ask you any questions about your parents, or if you remembered your father or mother?"

"I think not, sir; I don't remember his asking me a word about them."

"And have you never heard even the name of anybody who remembered them, or could tell you how you came to be sent to Grundon Union?"

"Never. I only know that I was taken there when I was quite a little baby, and given to Mrs. Purley. I wish I could see Mrs. Purley now. Do you know if she is alive, sir?"

Mr. Scarthey did not answer for a minute or two. "I must go to Grundon and look into the receiving-books, if they are in existence," he said then, without heeding my question. "I remember your being brought there quite well; and Mrs. Purley's daughter—let me see—she went to Fairhoe to nurse. I wonder if she is there now. If not, the old lady may know, if she hasn't gone quite crazy. No wonder if she did, after that place."

He spoke in a low even tone, as though he only thought aloud. "See here, my boy," he added, raising his voice and beckoning me towards him.

I rose and stood before him, and he placed a hand on each shoulder. "See here, my boy," he repeated. "I believe all that you have told me, for I remember that you were a boy to speak the truth; and I remember that

on the Sunday before you ran away from that place you went out of church. I heard afterwards that there was a strange-looking man in the churchyard, and that you had perhaps been talking to him. Was that man the gipsy you tell me of?"

"No."

"That gipsy must be found, my child; but you must not go back to him. Do you think you could be contented to work quietly after you leave here if I could find you a place?"

I said that indeed I thought I could.

"Well, we will see about it; but first, you must promise me two things; and remember that I trust you. I believe in your telling me the truth, so don't promise unless you mean to keep faith with me, or if you have forgotten all that I tried to teach you about the sin of lying. I did try to teach you, boy; and, though I seemed harsh, and perhaps cruel, I never meant to be. First, you must speak to none of the other prisoners here. The rule is silence; but some of them, and especially the boys, get an opportunity to speak to each other. There are but three boys here now, and two of them are thieves. They would make you a thief too, if they could. Promise me to answer none of their questions. You all sleep in one large room, and there is a warder there all night, but he can't always hear whispering. By day you work together sometimes, and they will make signs to you. Take no notice. I will come and talk to you every day, and will see that you come to no harm. Do you promise this?"

"Yes, sir; I would do more than that for you. Do

you know, sir, that the night before I ran away I stood outside your door and kissed it, because I thought how good you had been to me. Nobody had been kind to me then; and I don't think anybody has since, except Rory Lee, and Weevil, and the lady at the big house yonder; and the poor woman that gave me something to eat, and ——"

"Stop—stop, my boy," he cried, with the nearest approach to a laugh that I had ever seen upon his grim, stern face. "Nobody kind to you, and here you have mentioned half a dozen people already! I think you have been favoured with a good deal of kindness after all! and there is One who has been kind to you all the time. You will know all his love and kindness one day, and bless Him for it, though it may have seemed to be hardship and suffering. Your Father has been watching over you all the time."

"My father, sir? I never knew him or saw him in all my life."

"Your Father in heaven, Valentine. All the love that has cheered you has been of His making; all the hope that has kept you from sinking He has sent you; He has kept you from evil, and delivered you from temptation, and sent you such daily bread as was sufficient to bring you here; and I think you are sent here for some merciful purpose, and that you will find honest work and meat and drink if you will not forget Him!"

The change that had come over that scarred, set face! The sudden light that had shone upon it, the softening of its harsher lineaments, the assumption of some

influence which was almost beauty, moved me strangely; but before I could answer him the expression faded.

"I forgot all these things myself often, boy; but, thank Him, I remember them sometimes, and then all the bitterness of disappointment, the dark thoughts of anger, and revenge, and passion pass away, and I live in God's own sunlight for a time, till the clouds come again and make night within me."

He spoke still more to himself than me.

"I have had a great sorrow, that has darkened all my life," he said, looking at and yet seeming to see something beyond me and far away. "A disappointment and a deep wrong that might have made me worse than the worst prisoner committed to these walls; a wrong that put thoughts of murder and every evil into my heart, because I could not see it except through my own blind, selfish passion and revenge. I only tell you this," he added, in a louder voice, and bringing that far-off look back again to my face, "to let you know that all of us have to fight in this world—to fight against evil in many shapes, sometimes in the shapes of hunger and cold, and sickness and want, but more often in those of evil thoughts and wicked wishes and bad deeds. So you thought of me when you ran away, did you? God bless you! That is a great pleasure to me, for I thought my sour temper could gain little love, and that in that place, of all others, there was no soil in which love could grow. I haven't told you what else I want you to promise me yet, though. It is that when you leave here you'll not go away from the place that I think I can get for you without letting

me know. I think your gipsy friend will try to get you back with these people; and I don't say a word against him; but ask him to see me first, at all events, and do you yourself let me know, whatever happens. Will you promise this much? There must be a reason for that man keeping you, and for their following you up in London, and I should like to find out what it may mean. I shall go over to Grundon when I have leave, next month, and then I may learn a little more about it. Do you promise?"

"Yes. I will not go away without your knowledge—unless I am taken away by force."

"That's right; and now come with me. You must work, you know; and I think I shall put you to mat-making. There's nobody at that just now, except in the separate cells, and you can work in the corner of the mat-room. It will be better than picking oakum, and the man who will teach you how to go about it is deaf and dumb."

I think I cared very little at that moment what I worked at, or what I wore, or what I ate. Here was somebody who trusted me, and who, though he had said nothing, in as many words, on the subject, believed that I was innocent, though a couple of justices—and one of them a parson—had found me guilty. I went out of that cell with a swift though a faltering step, and, looking back at its smooth, spotless walls, gave a sigh of relief as my companion shut the closely-fitting door. I hoped I should never find myself on the other side of that door or listen to the click of its biting lock again; and I never did.

I was conducted along another corridor and down a stone staircase to a bare room on the ground floor, where, in a little closet at the end, I found a suit of greyish brown awaiting me, in exchange for the worn and weather-stained clothes that were taken from me by a warder. I was then consigned to a prisoner who filled the office of barber to the establishment, without speaking, but with a great clicking of his enormous shears.

"You needn't crop the boy too close. We don't want him in the infirmary with the jawsache," said Mr. Scarthey, so gruffly that I looked up in surprise from the chair, where I was steadied by the heavy hand of the operator on the nape of my neck. I don't know how it was, but I fancied directly that my friend had the character of being very strict in maintaining discipline, and I felt that it was necessary for him to keep up this character, for the other warder replied, "No; but you needn't take such superfine pains not to notch it, people won't see where he's come from, and then there 'll be all the more trouble with him when he comes here again."

I hoped I should never be under the control of that man, and I found afterwards that he superintended the oakum-shed, where the adult male prisoners worked. Happily for me, I was at once consigned to a kind of large store-room, where the warm air was strangely scented with the odour of rope, and a kind of tarry savour lingered about it, especially at one end, where piles of coarse mats were heaped from floor to ceiling.

At one end of this room stood three wooden frames,

each of them something like part of an artist's easel, and on one of these some coarse ropey-looking material had already been woven into the commencement of a common door-mat.

The deaf-and-dumb man, who, though he was a prisoner, seemed to be a kind of warehouseman, beckoned to me when Mr. Scarthey took me down, and while I stood watching him began to weave the fibre together with the help of an instrument which he placed upon the interlacing cords, that he might strike them down with a mallet. After he had gone through the operation two or three times he handed the tools to me, and I had just begun to understand how to use them when a great bell boomed out the summons to dinner.

The three boys, who were the only other juvenile inmates, were already seated at one end of a long deal table, nearly filling a sort of shed leading to the prison yard. Half a dozen wooden trays containing tin plates and porringers stood at the doorway of the main building, ready to be delivered to those adult prisoners who were separately confined in the cells, and a great steam, with a peculiar faint smell which reminded me unpleasantly of the soup-days at Grundon, kept gushing from the open windows of the kitchen, which also looked upon the bare paved yard.

Mr. Scarthey himself stood by to superintend the delivery of the dinners, and it was by his direction that I sat at the opposite side of the table to that occupied by my companions in misfortune. We all had a thick slice of coarse bread and a tin porringer con-

taining a stew, consisting of very little meat and a good deal of barley and potatoes. It was many degrees better than that provided by Mrs. Scraper, and there was certainly more of it; but it was strangely faint and tasteless, nevertheless. Perhaps in my experiences of the past two months I had acquired a taste for highly-seasoned food. The saveloys and meat-pies of London street-life are so savoury in their unwholesomeness that prison food is an unwelcome corrective.

I imitated the example of my companions, all of whom used the salt which stood in a wooden box on the table to a prodigal degree; but I couldn't finish my ration. I ate my bread instead. One of my opposite neighbours—a pale, slinking, red-eyed lad, with hair so sleek that it looked like mouse-coloured velvet pile—saw this at once, and nudged his companion, a bright, active-looking, cunning little fellow, with an old face on a small, round-shouldered child's body.

"Here, shove over your can, can't yer?" he whispered, without seeming to move a muscle of his face, and keeping one eye on me and the other on the warder, who stood at a little distance, watching us. "Blest if he ain't left 'arf of his slush an' thickenin' to pitch into his toke! My eye! here, change, can't yer? Now, look out!" and he slid his can dexterously across the table.

I put out my hand and pushed it back. "Well, eat it yourself, then, you fool; there wont be nothink but slack to-morrow; reglar skilly, an' no mistake," retorted the red-eyed lad with the same motionless face.

I think the warder must have heard him, for he came round sharply to my side of the table, but they were both staring straight before them, with faces so blank, and yet somehow so impudent, that he only warned them to "take care," to which piece of advice they replied by squinting horribly directly he had returned to his former place.

The third lad seemed to take no heed of anything but the food which he was engaged in devouring. I fancied he was a country fellow, for his hands were large and coarse, while those of the other two were soft and slim as a lady's; and he evidently was only just sensible enough to yield a sullen obedience to the rules of the place, where they were insubordinate under a quiet, submissive exterior, the assumption of which seemed to afford them constant amusement.

I need not say more about them, however, for we had very little except our meals in common, although we all slept in one good-sized ward, into which the faint odour of the kitchen seemed somehow to have found its way. The walls were simply whitewashed the one guarded fireplace, over which hung a lamp with a bright tin shade and reflector, was occupied with a pot containing coffee for the refreshment of the warder —a stolid and discontented-looking man, whose duty it was to watch us from a Windsor arm-chair as we lay in beds, each of which was formed of a strip of coarse canvas, stretched on a wooden frame, and covered with grey blankets.

There were three empty bedsteads between me and the nearest sleeper, so that I was quite separated from

the other three inmates of the room; but I could hear an occasional whisper long before I fell asleep, and as the warder, whenever he himself woke up from a doze, pretended to hear it also, and warned us of the fact by tapping the leg of his chair with a cane, our rest may be described as unequal, until the night wore on, and we all yielded to the warmth and silence of the place together.

On this first night of my imprisonment I lay with wide-open eyes, staring at one of the two high windows which were at the side of the room opposite the feet of our beds. I felt too wakeful even to try to steal a nap by the pretence of firmly-closed lids; and I could see the white clouds racing past the great silver disc of the moon, which pierced them and turned them into bright gauzy veils; then the white gave place to dun, and dun to slaty black, until the silver glory only streamed now and then through cracks and crannies of the solid sky that had striven so hard to lock it in and hide it.

I was watching for it again, when a rosy mist seemed to come up from the edge of the black—a mist that changed into a smoky, lurid glare, not bright, but still quivering—now pale and now deep red again. I was trying to think whether the sunset could have lasted so long, or whether I had really only been lying there for half an hour, when I slid suddenly into an abyss of sleep, and forgot all about it until the morning.

It was true that the next day was relieved only by rations of bread and thin gruel in the intervals of work; but I had become interested in the art of mat-

making, and gruel was therefore no great hardship. I was sustained by hope, too; and I felt that even the dread monotony of several weeks in prison might be borne if I only might see Mr. Scarthey now and then, and know that he still trusted me. Then there was enough to do to speculate upon what sort of place he would be able to find for me; and this was followed by a despairing sense of my inability to turn my hand to any useful trade. I had never even learned the gipsy business of peg-cutting, basket-weaving, or tinkering. I could see nothing for it but to work as hard as I could to master that of mat-making, and I set to with such a will all that day that I had no need to stare at the window after I went to bed.

I had forgotten that the next morning was that of Sunday until the warder reminded me of it, and pointed to a clean check shirt, at the bottom of a linen basket, telling me at the same time to be particular to wash my face clean. This I did at the basin in a sort of cupboard outside, to which one of us at a time was admitted. I had noticed on my way out that another of the beds had been occupied, and when I went down to breakfast—we had cocoa and treacle in honour of the day—I saw that another boy was seated at the table. He already had the prison dress on, but I could see in a moment that he was country bred. For one thing he could not relish the cocoa, and asked the warder if he might drink water instead.

Presently one of the two sleek companions asked him, with the usual motionless face, what he was in for.

He looked round vaguely, as wondering who had whispered to him, and either without knowing the rule that enjoined silence or quite careless of it, said aloud, "Why, for knockin' down a hare in paarson's wood—damn parson! as though a hare or so mattered a straw to 'um; and as if one loike me could help shyin' a stick when ——"

"Silence there. You're new here, but there's no talking allowed. You'll be clapped into the solitary cell if you speak to another prisoner."

"What; all alone by myself?"

"Yes. Silence, I tell you. You mustn't speak even to me without leave. So, now you know; and if you're caught at it again you'll be put in the cell, with bread and water, I can tell you."

The poor fellow stared, gasped, looked round at his companion, who had whispered to him, but who now, blankly innocent, regarded the opposite wall with a fixed expression; and finally occupied himself with his breakfast, but without losing the look of dogged resentment that had come upon his face.

Service was held in a large room, which had been adapted to the purpose of a chapel by being fitted with a set of forms upon which, as we sat, the Chaplain commanded a view of us from a plain, ugly painted deal pulpit, while the warders watched us from seats fixed against the walls, rather higher than the forms themselves. The place was divided in its whole length by a high partition, on one side of which sat the women prisoners, while the men and boys, again separated by a space between the forms, occupied the seats on the

other side. Mr. Scarthey, as head gaoler, had a sort of pew to himself in a corner; and the governor of the prison had another pew provided for his accommodation whenever he chose to make use of it, instead of attending the parish church.

It was so long since I had been inside a church that I had almost forgotten how to find the places in the prayer-book, which lay upon the form, where I sat, beside the country lad who had only come in the day before. I am afraid I thought of anything but the service, too, although I noticed that the congregation read the responses so loud that I couldn't help thinking they made up in this way for a week of enforced silence.

My thoughts wandered any whither, and I had quite lost all sense of what was being said or sung, although I stood up mechanically with the rest, when I heard the two lads in front of me intoning words that were certainly not in the prayer-book. The first of these words was "plum-duff," and the second and third "roast pork." They were talking in the chaunt belonging to the psalm for the day, and which was led by a clerk who stood by a little wooden desk under the pulpit.

I had no time to listen further, however, for another voice sounded in my ear—that of the lad beside me.

"Your name don't happen to be Valentine Day, do it?" he whispered, hoarsely.

I should have answered yes, but that I remembered my promise to Mr. Scarthey; and so I looked reso-

lutely at the wrong place in my prayer-book and began to sing.

"Because if it do," he went on in jerks, waiting for the singing to begin at every fresh gasp, "there's some friends o' yourn—as has paid your score—agin paarson, an' made—a red sky night afore last—I can tell 'ee. Two stacks—an' a barn roof o' thatch—all ablaze, an' nobbody took for't. I heerd all about it—in the wood—'fore I were took myself."

"Number five, you're wanted this way," said the sharp warder, as we filed out after the men had all been led to their places at their own tables, or to the cells to which they were confined. "I warned you against talking this morning, and now you'll see what the separate cell's like till to-morrow morning."

I am aware that these details may seem dull. It was a prison, and all is dull there. These particulars of dinner, cell, and bed make up the daily life which, like the white, smooth, unbroken wall, has no record of time or of human interest. It is a hopeless dead level, in which men fresh from the liberty of external nature, the freedom of the woods and fields, or men caught quick from the strife of town life, and active with excitement of brain and hands—even though the excitement be that of crime—would rather risk fresh punishment than subside at once into the hopeless despondency of silence and the dread obscurity of a number instead of a name.

Mr. Scarthey, as head gaoler, occupied two small private rooms in that part of the prison connected with the offices; and I suppose he had the privilege, as he

was a bachelor and kept no servant, of employing one of the male prisoners to do some of the domestic duties necessary for his comfort. At all events, I was rejoiced when, on the Monday morning, the warder of our dormitory told me that I was to wait till the rest had gone to work after breakfast, for that Mr. Scarthey wanted me to "clean up a bit" for him.

The cleaning up consisted of lighting a fire and sweeping the hearth in his sitting-room (a poorly-furnished place, but with a bright-looking bookcase, filled with books and some scientific instruments), and in laying the table for breakfast according to his directions.

Every other day—how long the interval seemed!—I went to "clean up a bit," and every time I did this duty I was fed from that plain but well-supplied table, after I had sickened at the prison fare. Once more I told him my whole history, comprised in the few months since I had scaled the workhouse wall; told him all but that one secret that lay, as I thought, in Fairhoe wood, where perhaps the leaves still covered the dead man's bones.

I think now that those few weeks were perhaps the most profitable in all my life. The turning point of my history lay in that prison and in the serious talk and good counsel of the stern, loving man. Sometimes he would leave me there, turning the key upon me and putting a book upon the table that I might read it and give him some account of what I had understood of its meaning when he returned from his morning rounds.

He taught me as much in the time that I stayed there under lock and key as I could have learned in a year elsewhere; for he was my friend, and trusted me. I think my first impressions of goodness sprang from that time—my first real beliefs did, I know; they were planted there in that close atmosphere of the county gaol, and were afterwards developed—too little, Heaven knows!—but still to what they ever have been—in the peace and quiet of the life that awaited me.

For he came in one morning as I sat there in his room reading; and when I rose, on hearing the key turn in the lock, he stood looking at me for a moment, in his usual way, with his hand on my shoulder; then, taking a letter from his pocket, said, "Well, my boy, I think I can put you somewhere where you will be taken care of. How would you like to be a schoolmaster?"

"A schoolmaster, sir. I know nothing; I'm too ignorant," I replied, laughing. I really could laugh in his presence, though he rarely smiled in mine.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," he said, with just one of these very rare smiles; "but you must learn before you teach. I've a letter here from my brother. I wrote to ask his advice about you a fortnight ago, and now here's his answer. He is a fine musician, James is, and comes to the town to teach twice a week, so that he has often to leave his school, some miles from here—a school where many young children as well as some older lads are taught; but it is a quiet country place, and, as James is a widower, there is no one to

look after his scholars when he is away. He thinks he could take you as a pupil-teacher."

"What is that, sir?"

"A scholar who learns more quickly by teaching others what he knows. There will be no wages, except, perhaps, a shilling a week of money to go towards clothes; but he lives comfortably, and you may be happy and useful there. If James teaches you all he knows you will be a bright man."

"I should like to go," I said; and then ashamed of the avidity with which I had said it, added, half truly, "but I would rather stay with you, sir."

"No, no, my boy; you may think so, but you are mistaken," he replied, mournfully. "If I had had a son, I fancy I could have wished him to be like you. If I had married, and Alice Orwood ——"

"Who, sir?" I stood aghast at that name.

He was talking to himself, as he so often did, and had not heeded my startled looks. "Did I mention her name," he replied, colouring; "well, I was doing so, forgetting that you can know nothing of all that, boy."

For a moment the stern set expression became dominant, but it softened once more as he said, "It will be better for you to go there. It is a pretty house, and sitting at the school-room window, you can see the woods and fields, and watch the children play; or go out and play with them in the pure free air. It will be well for you to wait there until I can try to learn something of your relations if you have any; or find that gipsy man of whom you told me. You will be there with James in peace and quiet."

"And he is your brother, sir?"

"I call him my brother, for he married my sister, who is dead. Any man might be thankful for such a brother as James Waine."

Waine, Waine, where had I heard that name before?

The day soon came when I was to be free—so soon that when I folded up the blankets of my prison bed, and was reminded, not unkindly, by the night warder, that it was the last time I should have to perform that duty, unless I was a fool and found my way there again, I could scarcely believe it possible that my term of punishment for being a rogue and vagabond had expired. And then I was no longer a rogue and vagabond. After I had finished breakfast, and had been taken before the governor—a white-headed, listless gentleman, lounging in an easy chair, in a small snug office, where a tray containing a handsome china service stood before him on a round table—I was conducted at once to Mr. Scarthey. The Governor told me that he was informed I was to have "one more chance of honest employment, and that he hoped my imprisonment would be a warning to me against idleness, and all the crimes that it led to, including poaching and wandering about the country doing nothing."

Mr. Scarthey went out as soon as I had wished him good morning. I thought he lingered at the door a moment, as though he wished to say something, and I had begun to cry in a very childish way at the thought of parting with him; for it was the outside of that

prison wall that seemed a blank to me now—the dreary waste of a doubtful future awaited me. I might not succeed in making another friend, and even his influence could not insure for me the regard of a new master. Some clothes were lying across a chair; pointing to these, he told me that they were mine, and, bidding me take off my convict dress, and wait for his return, went out; but I noticed that he did not lock the door after him; and even that omission was somehow a cause of fresh grief to me. It gave new force to my misgivings.

I changed my clothes hurriedly, though I felt a boyish pleasure in looking at my improved appearance in the little chimney-glass over the mantelpiece. The suit that replaced the clumsy grey prison dress was one of dark brown. Nothing had been forgotten, even to a coarse, but clean, white shirt—there were two more upon the chair—and a black neckerchief. I must have spent more time in contemplating myself than I imagined, for I was still standing on tiptoe in the fruitless endeavour to obtain a full-length view from the other side of the room, when there came a gentle knock at the door. I sat down on the nearest chair in some confusion, and then, remembering that I had no right to invite anybody to come in, waited until the knock was repeated, when, hearing no response, the visitor opened the door, and walked in, stopping half way when he saw me, and evidently as confused as I was myself.

He was a tall gentleman, with a slight stoop at the shoulders, and was dressed very neatly, in a dark

mixture coat and trousers, and a buff waistcoat, which, with his clean white neck-cloth, tied quite loosely under an open collar, gave him a remarkable look of cool purity, and a sort of staid spruceness that harmonised well with his long silvered hair, and fresh, fair skin. He was smoothly shaved, and his was one of the few faces that would bear inspection without the relief of beard or whiskers. A serene smile bent his well-shaped mouth; a kindly light played in his soft grey eyes; and, though the wrinkles of age marked his forehead, and some past grief had left its furrows here and there, they were almost turned into beauties by his placid and yet beaming looks. Wrinkles in him were but the dimples that time had taken from his childhood, to give them back again when he should have passed his prime.

"I suppose I may sit down, as Mr. Scarthey is not here," he said, presently; "he told me I should find you here, waiting to see me. Your name is Valentine Day, isn't it? I'll take a chair, if you please."

He sat down opposite me, and when I rose and stood by the window I could see that he stole curious penetrating glances at me now and then, at the same time drumming gently with his fingers on the elbow of the chair. Then he looked at me steadily, and, as though he had fallen into a deep reverie, drumming with the fingers of the other hand. At last he said, "I suppose you know that Mr. Scarthey has spoken to me; has made himself responsible for you if you come

and learn to assist me in my school. What do you say to it? Are you still in the same mind?"

I replied that I should be glad, indeed, if he would have me.

"Then we may consider it settled," he said. "I've been finding out all about you for the last ten minutes, and if you'll come, we can go away together at once. I've my pony-chaise waiting outside, and you can drive, can't you. You learnt that amongst your friends in the woods, I dare say."

There was something so gently genial in his voice and manner, that I was glad to know how much he had learnt about me. Mr. Scarthey had already told him all my history, and there was nothing to make known. In a few minutes he had found out how much, or rather how little I knew; for, by a well-directed question or two about the volumes that stood in the glazed bookcase, he led me on to talk of my erratic lessons of the past six weeks. I noticed that when he spoke of books and music he lost that sense of shyness which was on other occasions not the least pleasant part of his manner. I had a fancy that good books were like living individualities to him, and that he regarded them as he did eminent men, as in some sort superior both to himself and to the person to whom he was speaking, and, for that reason, had little diffidence when making remarks in their honour.

I must have seemed very ignorant. The thought of this struck me suddenly as I found myself talking on, and saw his quiet smile and beaming face regarding me in silence. I stopped suddenly, and felt a

burning flush upon my face—a flush, not of shame, but of surprised, regretful self-consciousness. "Go on; I like to hear you talk," said my new friend; but there certainly was a humorous twinkle in his eyes, and I don't know what I should have answered if Mr. Scarthey had not come in suddenly, to my inexpressible relief.

I need not dwell on our parting. I had known no such childish grief, except in the one instance of my leaving Mrs. Purley; and though we separated with a few words, I kept my head bent down to hide my tears as I climbed into the low chaise that stood at the side entrance of the gaol. My little bundle was already stowed in a kind of boot at the back of the vehicle, and not till my new master had taken the reins, and the pony had begun to move, could I look up with an attempt at a smile.

"Once a fortnight, if you can be spared, you will come here to see me, Valentine," said Mr. Scarthey, waving his hand, and almost before I could reply, as it seemed to me, we had left him standing there, sad and lonely, under the stone gateway, had jogged over the uneven stones of the road, and thence emerged amidst the glorious greenery of country lanes, the songs of birds, the joyous summer garlandage of hedgerow and cottage garden, and the sweet pure air of the distant fields, all glowing with the golden sheen of buttercups.

Hitherto I have recorded the events of that vagabond life with which I began the world—a life of days and hours, each bringing its strange change; a life of

shifting shadows, varying as the clouds that passing over it, tint it with their sombre hues, or, opening, let a glint of sunshine fall upon its troubled surface. All this was changed when I at last came out from beneath that prison porch. Thenceforth life lay still and calm, with a quiet light upon it, only now and then varied by the fleeting shades of some dim cloudlet that floated past and mitigated the monotony of the unbroken brightness. So it seemed to me long after I had made my home at that quiet place, half cottage, half school-house, from whose lattice-window I looked out upon the field where my pupils played. By my pupils, I mean most of the younger boys—the children—to whom I soon learned to impart the mere rudiments of reading, writing, and spelling. But I was afterwards able to do more than this, and to repay the master, who never stinted his own labour of love in my behalf, by helping him with some of the older boys.

It was a singularly retired life; but I grew in it. My stunted childhood, not altogether withered, put forth fresh leaves of promise, and budded into some kind of blossom under the genial influences of that serene air; for it was warmed by kindliness and love, and developed by means that seemed at the time to have only a superficial effect, but were potent for all good results.

I have said that Mr. Waine was an accomplished musician, and though he never could teach me more than the merest alphabet of his art, I loved to sit there, in the twilight of our little parlour, and listen to

him as he played on the piano, which was the one costly object amidst our plain household furniture. Better still I loved to lean my arms upon my desk, bury my face in my hands, and dream through the glorious music of the little organ that he had himself built at one end of the school-room, where it stood behind a heavy baize curtain. If anything helped to bring us closer together, and to make our relation to each other a living bond, instead of a mere formal agreement, it was his interpretation of his own loving temper in the glorious music; which some way opened up to me much that I could never else have realised in the romance and poetry that formed some part of our holiday reading. I cannot now remember how he taught me; I cannot recall periods of regular lessons; but I learned. It seems to me now that I grew up into such knowledge as I attained, just as I became taller, and, in a quiet way, more self-reliant. I had the company of some boys not quite so old as myself for part of the day; I had the society of a good, loving man; the blessing of orderly occupation, the privilege of reading grand books, and of imparting something of what I understood of them to others. The whole of that peaceful time dwells now in my memory of the past as one of unbroken rest, and yet of happy work. I regard it as the traveller who has crossed a strange, wild country, looks upon the level fields, where a tender light seems to linger, and food is ripening in the balmy air; or from amidst the ridges of rolling sand, sees the quiet pool under the date-trees glistening still, its unbroken surface reflecting the clear blue

above. So let it lie undisturbed, to be thought of always—with a loving reverence for those who made it what it was—with an abiding influence too deep to be recorded in set phrases, or in words that lose their meaning when I write them down.

We had few visitors, and I, at all events, seldom paid visits—indeed, for the first three months of my new life I scarcely ventured beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the scattered cottages along the road where the little church stood between us and a wide ridge of common, beyond which the outlying fields began.

In the winter season I was sometimes invited to farmhouses; but nobody knew anything of me, nor sought to know, except that I was the teacher at Mr. Waine's, and, as they thought, some relation of his. I had begun to take longer excursions by that time, and knew all the country round for six or seven miles; but by choice I still kept away from that part of it that led towards Fairhoe; and, though I had lost any fear of meeting Orwood, and had almost ceased to hope for tidings of Rory Lee, I remembered both as connected with that one secret which I had never yet confided either to my master or to Mr. Scarthey.

I often spent my weekly half-holiday in that plain, dull room in the prison, beneath the grim gateway of which I went now with strangely mingled feelings, which left me always in mild surprise that I should be permitted to come out again without question.

At last on one of these visits I heard something of that

past disappointment which had left its dark shadow on Mr. Scarthey's life. It was on a winter evening, just at the edge of dark, and I had begun to wonder how long it would be before my master came with the chaise, for he had promised to call for me and drive me home after his music lessons in the town were concluded. I sat on a low seat by the glimmering fire, and Mr. Scarthey sat opposite in his leather chair. The candles on the table had not been lighted, and all the room lay in shadow, except that part of the wall where the gleam of the red hot coals shone, and were reflected in the glass doors of the book-case. I think we had been talking of Grundon, and of pauper life there; for Mr. Scarthey had been, the day before, on a fruitless errand, to seek some information on the subject of my first admission to the union. All he had learnt, however, was the fact that I had been found on the doorstep of one of the guardians, who had afterwards left the neighbourhood because of his sister's marriage with a doctor. Mrs. Purley was still alive, as a kind of pensioner, at Fairhoe, where she and her daughter—a widow, with two children—occupied a little cottage, in consideration of their having jointly assisted in nursing that proud handsome lady, and in rearing her child.

"And I can't go there, Valentine; I can't go to that place, my boy," said Mr. Scarthey, with that far-off look which was common to his eyes when he talked to me, and yet seemed half forgetful of my presence. I think he had also forgotten how young I was. He never, else, would so have broken through that reserve

which made him appear so gloomy and unloving; or, was it that he had learned to love and trust me well enough to tell me something of that great sorrow that had made the history of his life?—that he needed the great relief of human sympathy, and so, in his pain, unsealed the tomb of his dead hopes and let another look upon them in his company, and share, if they might and could, the grief that had grown dumb with years?

"You remember, once, when you and the rest of the boys were out walking with me in Fairhoe Wood, don't you? Well, we met a man there, who warned us not to trespass, and who would have used his horsewhip upon some of you if I had not been by? That man was my deadly enemy, or I was his. I sometimes fear that I am his enemy now, and that I might be led to do him a mischief. I would not meet him where he might taunt or threaten me for the world's wealth, for he has done me such a wrong as I have never yet forgiven, though I have struggled hard. I pray that I may never meet that man again, unless I am upheld by a strength that shall make me able to subdue myself, and to beat off the seven devils that may strive to come into the house that I have tried to sweep and garnish. That man is the steward of Fairhoe, or was when I last heard of him, and his name is James Harrick."

I looked up at him with horror in my face, no doubt, but the fire had burnt low, and gave little light, except on one glistening pane of the bookcase, where it shone ruby red. He saw something in my looks, however,

for he motioned with his hand, and then, gazing at the shifting embers in the grate, said, "You wonder what that wrong could have been; and, though you are but a boy, I must tell you something of it, or you could not think of me as I could wish you to think. Have you ever heard me speak of Alice Orwood? Her name has seldom passed my lips for the last four years and more; but I may have uttered it when I have thought aloud, as I do sometimes, even when you are by. I loved her. She might have been my wife but for that man; and though she would have brought me but her own homespun clothes for a dowry, I would have cherished her. Her brother knew it, poor boy; and if he still lives, which I doubt, he could bear witness to my truth. James Harrick did her the worst wrong that could be done to woman, and me the worst wrong that can be done to man. He robbed me of her, and left her to die. She did die; and he went about, brutal and careless, like the accursed—heaven forgive me!—like the malefactor he is. She died; and I, who had waited long till she grew from childhood to be a woman, saw him swagger past her door where the coffin lay that held her poor, pale, shrunken body. I had not been near the place for two years; for I knew what had happened long before, and neither she nor her brother ever sent to me to say that they had been left penniless. I thought that young Orwood had something from his father; but they were starving—she sick and perishing, he sick and reckless; and that man who had wrought the evil——Oh! boy, I dare not think of him so, and go

near Fairhoe on the chance of bandying words with him, not even to see Mrs. Purley."

I had started up, and now stood before him. His hand was pressed tightly over his brows, his head bent down. I touched him on his shoulder. "Sir, sir!" I cried; "Mr. Scarthey, dear sir, dear friend, that man is dead. James Harrick, the bailiff of Fairhoe, was shot in Fairhoe wood long ago.

He sprang to his feet with a great gasp. "Where did you hear this, boy? Who told you? Never a whisper of it reached me, even by way of idle rumour, in my lonely life, apart from all mankind. Tell me, did those gipsies amongst whom you lived—I heard he hunted them off the land—did they hear of this, or was it a mere tale, a threat of what they would do one day? No word of his death reached me, but a report that he had not been seen for a week or two I heard, I cannot tell how long ago. What *do* you know of this, and how?"

His mention of the gipsies reminded me of my vow to Rory Lee, of my dread of the murderer; but I had gone too far to hesitate half way. His hand gripped my arm, and I could feel him trembling as he stood there, his breath coming thick and fast. At any pain to himself, and even by a breach of my enforced promise, I must tell him all.

"I saw him shot down myself, only two days after I ran away from the workhouse."

"Who did it? who did it? Heaven forgive him!" he groaned.

"*Her* brother."

"How do you know this? How did you learn his name? Valentine, Valentine, you never told me this. You saw this deed done, and know the mur——. Oh! it *was* murder; nothing can make it less, although it was the revenge that men wickedly call rough justice, as if there could be any justice, except with God. You saw it done, I say, and yet have never spoken of it till now."

He fell into the chair, and again covered his face with his hands, swaying himself to and fro in great mental agony. Then, kneeling at his feet, I told him how I had been sworn never to speak of that man nor of the murder; how I had last parted with Orwood on the edge of the forest; and how some dreadful spirit seemed to draw him on to the scene of his crime, and would, as I believed, take him there at last to die or meet his doom, unless he could be found.

He seemed to listen; but not till long after I had ceased speaking did he rise, slowly, and hold out his hand.

"You were right and wrong, my boy," he said, in his old tone, but with a great effort, as though he had come through a terrible struggle, and had lost his strength in the encounter. "You were wrong to vow whatever might have been the consequence; you were right to respect your vow if it had not been wrongfully made; and you were wrong to think more of it than of telling the truth; but you have lifted one awful load from my heart, to leave another there. This wretched man—he who might have been my brother—who is my brother still—where could I find him? Or,

better still, I must seek out this gipsy all the sooner for this reason, and learn of him where Orwood can be found."

"That's not a better plan," I said, quickly; for I knew Rory Lee better than he did, and saw danger in his learning that the murderer was known. "If Rory once knows that I have told you, he himself might be the first to give up Orwood, sir. He has some reason for keeping the secret; but no gipsy would do that for mere honour; don't think it. I think you had better look for him in London, when you can go yourself; for he wanders about from place to place, and nobody knows where he may sleep on any night. If I see Rory Lee, and I think he must have gone away from this country, but if I see him, leave it to me to ask about it."

He could only answer by pressing my hand, for there was a knock at the door, and Mr. Waine came in.

"What, all in the dark?" he said, with his subdued gaiety of voice and manner. "You must have been engaged with bright thoughts to forget the candles and let the fire burn almost out; where do you keep your matches, William?"

"We have had dark thoughts, and darker words, James," said Mr. Scarthey. "But I will get a light before I speak to you that which I must speak to-night; to look at your face will be a comfort to me, brother, for I need its friendly kindness most sorely."

"I will just go down to the gate and see to Peggy, sir," I said. "I can wait for you there."

Mr. Scarthey had lighted the candles, and, as I went up to bid him good night, I could see that he was very pale, and his eyes were quite bloodshot. "Good-night, my boy," he said; "good-night!" and stooped to kiss me on the forehead.

For the first mile that we rode home through the sleet that beat in our faces we were quite silent; and as I had to drive, and Mr. Waine seemed to retire somehow into the ample collar of a vast great-coat, I had enough to do to keep the pony steady until we turned down the road, where we had the wind at our backs. I should have thought that my master had dropped off to sleep but for the occasional whispered exclamations which he made to himself. At last I ventured to say, "Was Mr. Scarthey better when you left him, sir?"

"Yes, Valentine, he was better; but this story of yours has shaken him very much. We are both shaken by it. I almost wish you had kept your own counsel, my boy; though I don't wish that either; for it would have been wrong. I am in doubt now whether it is not wrong to keep this man Orwood from justice; but William never could bear it. It is very hard for my brother, very hard; and yet we are to do our duty; to do no evil that good may come. It is strange that Mr. Fairhoe should have been silent all this time, too."

"What, does nobody know that the murder is done, sir?"

"Nobody but yourself, and this gipsy, and Mr. Fairhoe, and the guilty man himself. Don't speak of

it here; the very trees seem able to whisper it; the air almost grows thick with a secret so awful."

The very thought that had come to my poor little ignorant soul on that dreadful morning in the wood, where now, beyond a doubt, the body still lay, covered by the leaves—unless, indeed, it had been placed in a grave known only to him who dug it; perhaps under that very tree where I had crouched trembling, an unwilling witness of the crime in which neither he nor I had any share.

"Don't you think, sir," I said presently, almost in a whisper, "don't you think that if Mr. Scarthey could find that man he might persuade him to give himself up to justice; he will do it one day, sooner or later, unless he should fall dead before that time."

"Fall dead? Did he look likely to die when you saw him?"

"Yes; he was wearing himself out, and said that the end was near."

"I think your suggestion is the best, Valentine; but wait till we get home. I can't speak, I can't even think, about it till I've sat down where there are fire and light. We'll have some supper, and I'll play that Twelfth Mass, and then we shall be able to talk. Poor lad! Poor boy! It must have been very dreadful to see it, and you a mere child, too!"

It was to be a night of strange revelations. We reached home late; and when I had put the pony into the stable and made him comfortable for the night, the one servant (a deaf old woman, who had also been servant to Mr. Waine's wife's mother) had gone to bed

There was a bright fire, however, and supper was ready. It is part of my experience that we always take note of small and apparently insignificant details on momentous occasions, or on occasions which afterwards prove to be momentous, though we may be ignorant of it at the time; and I remember that roasted potatoes and broiled bacon were kept hot in a dutch-oven inside the fender. Scarcely a word was spoken, but both Mr. Waine and myself ate rapidly, as though we wished for no more than would satisfy hunger; then he sat still for a few minutes, took the candles to the piano, and began to play; while I sat there, my imagination crowded for a time with thickly-coming fancies, until the solemn music seemed to marshal my thoughts to its sonorous swell, and gave them some kind of rhythmical order.

I don't know where that glorious harmony might have carried me, for I was lost to the time and the place, until it suddenly ceased; and, on looking up, I saw that Mr. Waine had risen from the instrument and was bringing the candles back to the table.

"Yes, your plan would be best, Valentine," he said, nodding very gravely, and slowly subsiding into the easy-chair, as though he intended to clear the subject from all further doubt by discussing it thoroughly. "The question is, where to find this man? I really do wish that poor William had never gone to that place where he first met Alice Orwood. It has blighted his whole life. Strange, that it should so centre round Fairhoe. There seems to be a blight on that place too."

Perhaps he saw that I was watching him with inquiring eyes, for he stopped a moment thoughtfully, and then said,—

"My brother has told you nearly all his secret, Valentine, and you seem to be strangely mixed up in it. The whole thing is marvellous; though there may be some explanation found hereafter. Did you ever hear anything of William while you were with the gipsies? Was he known to any of them?"

"I think not. I never heard his name."

"I suppose not. And yet they must have known his mother, I think. I married his half sister, you know; and his mother was a connection of my family —a kind of cousin of my father. She lived at Havering, and even she, or, at all events, her daughter, my poor, dear wife, had some strange connection with Fairhoe. It is almost a wonder that my name is not familiar to you if you have been about there much, for another cousin of mine, though I scarcely knew him, was steward there for two generations before Harrick went. The name of Waine was almost as well known, I should say, as that of Fairhoe; though perhaps people who knew him and his daughter, poor little bird! were careful not to mention it too often after they had gone away."

Waine! Waine! Where *had* I heard that name before?

"My poor wife was quite a young girl—a mere child —when my cousin, Silas Waine, took his daughter to Havering, away from young Mr. Oswald Fairhoe; and she—my wife, I mean—was set to watch the poor young creature, lest she should get some message or

letter from him through the gipsies; for my cousin was as proud as all the Fairhoes put together, proud as they were of their pure blood and their name, that name that was above the honour of accepting a title; and he would never have listened—no, I don't believe he would have listened—to the suit even of the haughty mistress of the house if she had sued on her son's behalf and asked him to let Barbara Waine be married to Oswald Fairhoe in the parish church."

Was the music still in my head and turning my brain, or what could be the recollection that flashed so suddenly upon me?

"Stop, sir; stop!" I cried. "Say those names again. Isn't Mrs. Fairhoe's name Waine, and wasn't she—weren't they married somewhere in London?"

"What are you talking about, Valentine? Pray, do stand off my feet, my dear boy, and don't knock the candle down with your elbow. See, you've greased your coat. No, no; Silas Waine, as I have always heard, took his daughter away; and were lost at sea. Poor dear! Poor dear!"

"What is a marriage certificate, sir?"

"Why do you ask? I can show you one; my own. Bring me my writing-desk off the table by the window yonder."

I carried the desk into the light; and, after selecting the key from a bunch that he carried in his pocket, he opened the lid and from a little drawer took a folded paper.

I knew the look of it directly, although it differed from that which I had seen spread out upon the gipsy's

knee after it had been crumpled in the dead man's hand.

"If that is a marriage certificate, sir; and you were to put the name of Barbara Waine here and Oswald Fairhoe there, I have seen a paper just like it—a paper that Rory Lee took out of Harrick's hand in the wood."

"Valentine, my dear lad, you had better go to bed. Let me feel your pulse. You are feverish, and I'm afraid poor William's story and all that you have repeated have been too much for you. I'll make up a little medicine for you, boy; and you'll be better in the morning."

"I'm not ill, sir."

"No, not very; but you are over-excited, and I don't wonder at it. It's enough to make older heads shake upon their shoulders. Come, get to bed; and I'll bring you up a draught to take before you sleep."

"Then you think I am wandering in my mind, sir; but I'm not. Rory Lee called me to him to look at that paper as he held it, and three or four of his people heard me read it out aloud. If that's a proof of marriage in a church ——"

"What was the name of the church, Valentine?"

"I can't remember; but it was in London, and was signed by the parson."

"It is very strange, but don't think any more about it to-night, my boy; and do take the draught that I'll bring up to you. We'll sleep upon it, and then see what we can make of it in the morning."

I took the draught, and to the best of my ability,

slept upon it, though that sleep was haunted by strange dreams; but the morning made no difference in my story, and my master said he would call again on Mr. Scarthey and devise how we might best discover Rory Lee.

I could have found him if he were in England, but they would not hear of my undertaking a journey which might have cast me loose upon the world for some months; and, to tell the truth, I had little personal desire to go on such a quest. Once Mr. Scarthey went to London, and, aided by such information as I could furnish, sought for Orwood here and there, without success, for he refused to take me with him. Orwood was a desperate man, and he must never know that I had whispered his name or made known his crime. Indeed, both my dear masters were as careful of me as if I had been a child, though I was a well-grown lad, and had, I think, a quiet self-reliance that would have kept me from any serious danger. So the year came to a close without any clue whereby we might learn what both my protectors so much wanted to know. The winter had almost gone, and snowdrop and crocus had been succeeded by a hundred fresh buds that dotted trees and bushes with their delicate green; the promise of another year had come upon the earth, and the tempered wind blew in bated gusts just warmed by the breath of the still-distant summer. On one of the mildest of these spring days I was sitting at the window in the school-room. The air was so soft and the scent of the garden so grateful that I had opened the lattice casement and sat listening to the organ, as Mr.

Waine played. I think I had fallen into a day dream, for it had been a busy morning, and I was tired; at any rate, I was inclined to make the most of the hour between morning school and dinner; so I had taken a book, and, instead of reading, lounged there listening, and looking, and sniffing, in the full enjoyment of the exercise of three, if not four, of the five senses. I suppose I had been there half an hour, when I heard the scraping of a foot upon the roadway beyond our garden fence, and, looking towards the gate, saw two men standing there. The one who came first, and was at that moment feeling for the latch, was a tall, slim, middle-aged gentleman, handsomely, but quietly, dressed, and with gloves upon his hands. His face was tanned a little, as though he had come from abroad, and he carried a walking-cane, with which he knocked upon the fence until his companion came forward and vaulting over the gate, unfastened it from the other side. I should have known that second face and figure anywhere. They had been impressed too indelibly upon my memory for me to forget them, even though their ordinary lineaments were common to half a dozen men of the same race.

"Mr. Waine," I cried, running to the organ, "can you come down, sir? Here is Rory Lee; and here comes Mr. Scarthey," I added, as I saw the third visitor walking swiftly on the other side of the road.

CHAPTER VII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

I REACHED the house door before the two visitors had closed the garden gate behind them; but, after one swift, keen glance at me, the gipsy sprang along the path until he reached my side, and there stood with his arm round my neck waiting for his companion to come up.

"I've looked half over Eastern England for you, lad, since I came from France," he said; "and it was only from one of the boys hereabouts that I heard where you had been in that place yonder, where I saw the gaoler. I will pay out Thyrza and the rest of them for their dumb jealousy before I die, if I leave the tribe for it for ever. I owe them a grudge for parting with you that may want blood spilt to wipe it out yet, unless you can show me that it was none of their fault. They swear that you ran away, and that Bartho came to grief trying to bring you back. That's a lie, I know; though

> There's never an eye but of gipsy race
> Can read the lie in a gipsy face.

There, there's a rommany jingle to show that it's Rory Lee speaking to you.

"You know what I told you long ago, lad: that I could do more for you than any one in the world, if you would but stay with my folk and be quiet; and now I shall set about it in real earnest; for here comes a gentleman to help me. He's been away in foreign parts: to-day here, to-morrow there; and I've had a long waiting to meet with him at last; and then when I found him I'd lost you. And here comes the gaoler, too. Master Ravel asked him to come on here after us, for that he must hear what we had to say to Mr. —how d'ye call him—Waine, isn't it?"

I noticed that a strange contortion seemed to pass across the gipsy's features as he mentioned my master's name; and he talked on rapidly, without waiting for an answer. I had never seen him so excited. He looked little older for the years that had passed since our separation. His hair and beard were as crisp and glossy black, his eye as bright; and, except that he was less ruddy and his face was thinner, he looked no older.

The gentleman of whom he had spoken as Mr. Ravel had waited until he was overtaken by Mr. Scarthey, and they walked along the path together. I had scarcely time to tell Rory of my separation from the gipsies at Bow fair, before they came up. I seized the moment's opportunity to whisper in my friend's ear, "Not a word about Orwood till I have spoken to Rory Lee," to which he nodded assent. Then they went into the house, and I was left standing at the door alone.

I was strangely disquieted by a tumult of conflicting

thoughts and an undefined fear of some impending change. I knew that the colloquy which was going on inside concerned me nearly, and yet I was at a loss to imagine in what way. That the brothers Mr. Scarthey and Mr. Waine had a kind and loving interest in my welfare I knew and could understand; but Rory Lee was a mystery to me. I had never been able to master the secret of his fierce regard or to comprehend the motive of his persevering care of me after that awful morning in Fairhoe wood. Had he been the murderer I could have understood it better; but I had never guessed his motive for the concealment of the deed much less his care of me because I was the only other witness of it. Now that a stranger had come to interest himself in my poor affairs I was altogether puzzled, and stood there leaning against the doorpost, wondering whether anything could have been heard of the father or the mother who had cast me away so early, that I feared I should have no such love for them as they might wish to claim so late.

After all, there might be only some discovery of a distant relative who was willing to help me a little in the world; but I quickly made up my mind on that subject by reflecting that few mere relatives, unless they were closely allied by blood, would care to burden themselves with the doubtful child, the pauper child, the ——, perhaps the ——! I could not say the word. A burning flush glowed on my cheeks. It was not anger—I don't think it was shame—that moved me so strongly; but I felt, with all the sudden force of an uncontrollable emotion, how hopelessly alone I stood in

the world. And then, my mother—I felt shame for her. Who was she? How had she borne to part with me? Perhaps she had gone—wandered away to some of the deep dells where I had so often sat, with the rustling leaves up to my knees—and had there lain her down to die, with only the summer wind to sigh for her, and the birds to sing their evening hymn with some strange change in their notes, perhaps, because of that still silent form that had come there beneath the trees and would not go away. My father—who was he? and why, in all those years, had no word come from him to that grim place to which I had been consigned as though no hope had ushered me into the world, and no love had survived my coming? I don't think I felt any hate for that unknown man. I hope I felt none; but the flush was still upon my face, my hands were still clenched, and I was all confused—wondering, wondering—when I heard a strange voice beside me, and Mr. Ravel, standing near, asked me if I would walk a little way with him, for he had something to say to me.

We went out of the garden and, crossing the road, began to walk slowly along the footpath skirting the play-field before he spoke; but I could see that he regarded me with a penetrating glance of inquiry, almost of interrogation, as though he at once endeavoured to recall some particular circumstance to his memory, and to judge of my own thoughts and those wandering speculations which had caused the confused reverie in which he found me.

"I find it difficult," he said, "to tell you the reason

of my coming here; but as it relates to you it is right that you should know it, especially if it should lead—as I hope it may—to my seeing you again, when I can speak more plainly than I can now. First let me tell you that when you were quite a baby, a mere infant, I held you in my arms; and if the inquiries that I intend to make, lead to the end that I expect, I shall be able to say that I know your parents."

"Are they alive, then, and both of them?" I inquired, stopping suddenly to look in his face for some confirmation of his words. He spoke so deliberately, so guardedly—as I thought, so coldly—that I could scarcely believe he had good grounds for such intelligence.

His eyes were full of a kindly, pitying light, however, as he answered my question, taking me by the arm as he spoke and turning back towards the house again. "I think so, but I don't know; I can only hope so. I have much to discover before I can tell you—before I dare tell you who they are; for the disappointment would be great, and, if my best hopes are verified, our position will be very difficult. You have had enough of training in strength of mind and goodness here, I think, to make it possible for you to wait with patience until you learn more. This is what I want to ask you to do; to remain here for some time, at least; to make no change without first communicating with me. Here is my address," he added, putting a card in my hand. "If you should need advice or help before I see you again, write to me at once. I am a lawyer, you must know, and am quite

used to giving people advice; and, being a lawyer, I don't like to do anything in a hurry, or to go upon insufficient evidence. May I trust you to stay here, and wait patiently for a time, and will you believe that I am your friend? I think that Mr. Waine will tell you I am worthy of confidence, for we are partially related, though very distantly, and only by marriage. If I should write to you to come to London, come at once. You have other friends there, not relations—friends who knew your mother far better than I knew her."

"Why cannot she come to me? Why did she leave, from that time you tell me of, until now, for all these years, and never heed me till I am"—I was going to say, "almost a man;" but I blushed, faltered, and added, "Why, at least, cannot I go to her?"

His hand tightened on my arm, and he seemed to be struggling for a moment with some deep feeling. "She is thousands of miles away," he said, in a low, sorrowful tone.

"Sent away?" An awful suspicion flashed upon me. Who was she? What might she not have done! The interest of Rory Lee, the inspection of the old gipsy dames, Mr. Swiffle's strange intimacy with my career, all these things seemed to have a dreadful meaning; would it be better or worse for me ever to know her who should have claimed my childish love, and to whom I might not be able even to give the cold substitute of common respect?

"She was not sent away; she went under a grievous mistake, and by a deep wrong."

"Went and left me on a doorstep to be taken to the Union at Grundon? Oh, sir!"

"No; you were in careful hands when she parted with you; with those whom she had reason to trust, and she believed that she would see you again. You were lost, not deserted, by those who should have had charge of you; she thinks that you died. They have thought so for all these long years, and even now it is difficult to join together all the separate links that will make the chain of evidence complete; I mean the evidence of your being the child who was so long lost."

"She was not guilty, then?"

"Guilty! what do you mean, boy?" he said, with such sudden energy, and with such an almost angry emphasis that I was startled.

"You said that she went away under a grievous mistake, and by a deep wrong. She was accused of something, then? I thought you meant so, sir, indeed; but it will make me happier to hear that that was my mistake than you can think."

He stopped again, took my hands in his—I could feel that his own slim, white fingers trembled. "Your mother, if indeed she be your mother—she whose son I hope and believe you are—was a lady. I will prove to you that I think her son can be a gentleman by telling you the greatest secret in all my life. If she could have been my wife, I should have been proud of her—should have given her all the love that is in my nature, for I loved her very dearly, though she never knew it."

I don't know what it was that touched me so keenly in this speech. It must have been, I think, partly the wonderful strangeness—not only that this man, courtly, well-dressed, and of such graceful carriage, should have given me this confidence, should have regarded me as of his own condition, and in common language treated me like a gentleman—it was also that I really did feel that I could accept his trust; that something within me responded to the call that he had made; that, rogue and vagabond no longer, but with all the influences of my later life full upon me, I had attained to something—or something had been developed in me which made me at one with him. My heart was too full for thanks—for further questioning, or for more than a few broken words by which I pledged myself to abide by his counsel, and to seek to know no more at that time. Then I turned away to hide a great burst of grief, for I was still boy enough for the painful relief of tears; and he walked slowly back, leaving me to follow him.

Rory Lee was standing in the garden; the brothers were talking together at the door. There was something peculiar in the gipsy's manner; and as I approached I saw that he was deeply engaged in carving and peeling a hazel stick with his clasp-knife. He did not—and, as I thought, would not—look up. What was amiss? Was it a part of that new feeling within me that I should, by some subtle instinct, divine what were his feelings? It was he who had brought about this inquiry, or had at least had something to do with the intelligence that had put it into force; and he waited there

to see what I should say to him, to learn whether I yet believed that he had some true interest in me. I should belie my own knowledge if I represented that there was anything profound in the gipsy character. There is swift wrath, cherished revenge, unmatched cunning, great faithfulness between members of the same tribe to certain traditional clauses of the code which stands to them for morals; but there is little depth either of affection, generosity, or gratitude. To the outer world rarely are either of these sentiments displayed, and to cherish them is to forfeit a title to be considered a true member of that mysterious fraternity. Something had wrought a change in Rory Lee that must have been long in growing even to the imperfect disposition which he displayed. Over a face scarcely susceptible of any emotional expression a curious look had stolen—a look that in anyone else would have been pensive, mournful, almost appealing. With him it took out the usual hard, eager glitter — the bare, brassy look — and left, if not a blank, a something indefinite.

I knew not what words to use. I think I did better than speaking. I stole up to him and put my arm about his neck. I had never done so before, and a quiver ran through his wiry frame. He lifted his head with a sudden, almost scared, look; gripped the hand that was over his shoulder with those tapering brown fingers, that pinched like an iron vice, and then stared me in the face, and broke into a dissonant laugh as he flung the hazel stick over the hedge.

"You've heard all about what you are to do and

not to do, Valentine," he said, "from one that can patter better than even Rory Lee, unless he spoke in another tongue that you've forgotten by this time. Keep quiet, and mind what he says, if you'd be brought safe through. He spoke to you about your father, did he, or him that we think is your father? He spoke about him, but without telling his name?"

"No; I have heard little about him. Do you know him?"

The gipsy crooked his finger, placed it at the side of his nose, and slowly shook his head.

"Mr. Ravel told me something of my mother, but very little. Did you know her, too?"

A swift change came upon his face — his eyes dilated, his nostrils quivered, his chest heaved. For a moment he looked like some wild animal that hears the sound of dogs and men, and hesitates whether to fly or stand at bay.

"I knew her," he said, nodding his head; "and listen, lad," he added, in a whisper, bringing his face close to mine, "I loved her better than my right arm. I think I could have died for her, or have changed my gipsy blood for milk, and settled down to tend cattle and do farmwork all my days. All my people look askew at me because they know that I loved her better than——" He stopped suddenly.

"I have only just heard that she was a lady," I said, with a sudden pain and a feeling of repulsion from the man that I could scarcely control, which was then quite inexplicable, except that even my small claim to use

the word mother, and connect it with some unknown but loveable woman, made his assertion jar upon me with a disagreeable force.

"Yes! who says not?" he returned, doggedly, and in a mixture of his own strange language with ordinary words; "but had she been queen, no power on earth could have kept me from loving her. There have been times, boy, when men of our tribes have not only thought but told their love to ladies higher and prouder than the daughter of ——, than she who was your mother, and have carried them off to the tents or to the houses of our people, where they have gold to show and have been made gipsy wives, to make their husbands gentile men, just as some of our women have been wedded to pale nobles and sat on silken seats and worn big jewels, and have been cursed and turned upon by their people ever after, as I have been, and as I may be still."

He shook his half-closed hand as if to warn me not to answer him, and strode away towards the garden-hedge; another minute and he had stooped to pick up a stone, flung it far across the fields, turned swiftly round, and come back to me, every trace of his late moody passion gone.

"You won't seek to learn more till you hear from us then," he said—"from the scholar yonder, that is, or from me: and hark ye, lad, don't ask the two men here to tell you what they know. Nothing's certain, and you may spoil all. They tell me I may come to see you now and again, and then we can take a half day in the woods together. You will have a horse to

ride, too; there's room here in the stable for another crib."

"I beg you not to send it. I can ride well enough, and I've not forgotten all your lessons yet. Come to me as often as you will, but send nothing."

"You'll come out for a day with me, then, such times as you can leave here? You a gentleman, and neither to ride, nor box, nor leap, nor run! why, a gipsy gentleman would be a better man than that!"

There was something bitter in his tone that I could scarcely understand; but I said I would do either with him when I had opportunity, and so he waved his hand again and went away towards the gate, where he watched me keenly as Mr. Ravel bade me "Good-bye!" and told me that my two friends would advise me, as he had done, to wait with patience until I could learn more of those relations whom I had never known.

Neither Mr. Waine nor Mr. Scarthey would say a word to me that I had not heard already. The subject was mutually avoided; and, except that on one occasion they advised me very earnestly to build no eager hopes upon what had been said by the barrister, but to wait at least for a few weeks in patience without even writing to him to make inquiries, it was never mentioned between us. I thought, however, that my dear master was kinder to me, more anxiously careful about me than ever—if, indeed, that could have been possible—and he reluctantly consented to my making my first excursion with Rory Lee, who rode up to our gate leading a saddle horse for me. I soon regained my seat, and, though I could only go out about once in

a fortnight, those afternoons in the fields were very pleasant. In fact, I had begun to grow silent and moping, and the active exercise stirred my blood and kept me from unhealthy brooding. We had boxing, too, in the chaise-house, for Rory had brought a set of gloves; and first rather to the dismay, but afterwards to the great amusement of Mr. Waine, we used to pummel each other soundly. I never, at that time, could make out why, on these occasions, when I left my shirt unbuttoned at the collar, my kind master would not be contented until I had loosely tied a silk handkerchief round my neck. I had four peculiar marks low down towards the shoulder, and he could never bear to see that place uncovered.

So time wore on, untroubled except by speculations of what might lie hidden in the future. Rory must have been somewhere in our neighbourhood, but I saw none others of his people, and not a tent was pitched nor a tilt cart drawn up in lane or common. He chose to be mysterious about it, and I had grown so used to his secret humour, that it ceased to trouble me. One day, when we had been out together, (and I may remark that we never went far towards Fairhoe, avoiding it as by a common instinct,) he suddenly asked me if I had heard or seen anything of "*that* man" since I parted with him at Bow.

I knew what man he meant well enough, and thought it a favourable time to speak to him of Mr. Scarthey's earnest wish to meet Orwood, and urge him to confession. Strangely enough, perhaps, I had ceased to dread Rory Lee, and his mysterious signals and

sudden gusts of passion had no terrors for me. I fear that I may have regarded him as a sort of amicable savage—a savage of fine breeding and good taste, but with many such qualities as belong only to the shallow life of uncivilization.

I began, as I thought, very judiciously; saying how much I owed to my dear old friend, who had been kind to me even before I ran away from Grundon, and had made me what I was; touched lightly on his sad story, dwelt on his yearning anxiety to meet the brother of her whom he had loved so hopelessly, pointed out how easy it would be to trace the man if he (Rory) would but find the clue, and so bring Mr. Scarthey and him together.

The fine perceptions of the semi-savage were too many for my carefully prepared deceptions. He answered nothing, but with a grim smile that had something threatening in it—brought his stare upon me, focussed me with those glittering eyes of his, and said slowly, "You have told Mr. Scarthey about that man killed in Fairhoe Wood, and have told him who fired the shot that sent him down: you break your oath to me, and then ask me to help you."

"Yes," I said, returning his stare as well as I was able, but disconcerted, nevertheless. "I broke my oath, as you call it, because you forced me to make it; no gipsy keeps such oaths even if he keeps others; and I broke it too, because it was an evil plight that must work mischief. I never will keep such vows—never will make such again if I can help it."

His look grew very black, but he only added, "See

that you don't stir in this yet, or more evil still will come of it that you know nothing about. I am going away for a week or two, or maybe more. If I see Orwood in the mean time I will speak to him of what you have told me; but, mind, say no word of that man or of him that lies yonder. Will you promise that?"

"No," I replied, rather nettled at his peremptory tone. "I make no promises at all, though it would be strange, indeed, if I should speak of it, seeing that we have few visitors, and I should keep such a matter from idle gossip. It has been a heavy secret to me too long for me to seek to remove it by such light means now."

We parted soon afterwards, less cordially than usual, and he struck across some fields in an opposite direction to that in which we were then walking. Summer had come again, and it was yet early in the afternoon, so that I lingered here and there, walking slowly, and peeling in a fantastic pattern a stick I had cut from a little thicket just off the main road.

It must have been near evening when, sitting on a stile, and finishing this thoughtless work, but thinking dreamily all the time, I heard a sound of rapid wheels grinding the dry roadway at some distance, and presently, as I stood up to listen, a shrill cry sounded above the whirr, and I could see a light chaise coming along at a furious pace. The horse was galloping madly, swerving from side to side, as though from some sudden fright, and I could see but one person in the chaise—a woman—her veil and ribbons streaming in the still air,

one hand grasping the reins, but powerless to check the fearful speed at which she was borne. I had no more time to look at her, for in another minute the chaise would have been opposite the spot where I stood. Without reflection, I buttoned my loose jacket and sprang into the road, running at my best speed the same way that the horse was coming, and keeping my eye on him as he tore along. Further down the road I knew that there was a gap in the hedge leading through it to a soft, level field, where the ground was thick with grass, and heavy for the wheels; and, if I could but head him to that spot, I might avert the danger that threatened the occupants of the chaise, for I could see now that with her other hand the lady who held the reins clasped a child—a boy, I thought he was—who clung to the skirts of her dress. She was half-standing in her effort to get greater purchase on the bit; but none but a strong man's arm could have stopped the hard mouthed beast she tried to govern.

On they came, at a pace which I knew would require all my activity to maintain, even for a minute; but I fancied that the vicious brute swerved a little as I ran, and I kept on, holding my broad felt hat at arm's length, in the middle of the road. By the time that he was only a yard from me, the sight of the object in front of him had checked him, and before he could dash away again I sprang to his head, and with all my strength bore him back upon his haunches. It was well for me that I had learned something of Rory Lee's craft; for I continued to hold him until the lady sprang out with the child in her arms. They fell toge-

ther on the grass at the roadside, but neither was hurt, and I begged her to stand still for a moment till I had striven to quiet the horse, which now stood stamping and quivering as I clutched him with the firmest grip that I was master of. There was no house near, and I must either leave them to walk home, or tame the beast to submission. I tried the latter course, and so far succeeded that I was able to drive him after another furious gallop under my control, instead of at his own sweet will. I had found out the secret of his temper. He was in a new harness, and had been put to by some clumsy hand. I took him out of the chaise, harnessed him afresh, and left his girth looser. I think I was proud of my success when I led him up to the footway where the lady was standing watching me.

"I am under great obligation to you, and one which I shall find it very difficult to repay," she said, with stately courtesy. "May I be permitted to inquire what is your name?"

"Valentine Day," I replied, looking at her closely, for the first time. Was it something in her voice that thrilled me, or had I an instinctive knowledge of her presence by some subtle influence that attracted and yet repelled me.

"I am Mrs. Oswald Fairhoe," she said.

There she stood, that proud, stately lady of my dreams, her broad forehead scarcely wrinkled by the dread secret in which I shared. A line or two of silver in the smooth bands of her dark shining hair; her eyes, defiant still, but with some of their fire quenched; her

figure erect, but thinner; her rich dress, more careless. Yes, it was Mrs. Oswald Fairhoe, with the story of weary years added to her life; and beside her, still clinging to her dress, was that child, the boy, whose birth was so ill-omened, whose little thoughtful face, and earnest, inquiring eyes, seemed to ask what made him different to other children, and when he should learn the secret that lay so heavily upon their house.

I don't know that I thought of all this at the time. I thought of nothing. I was as one spell-bound, until Mrs. Fairhoe's voice recalled me to myself. She held my hat in her hand, and was brushing it with her dainty glove. She came and placed it on my head, and I felt the blood rushing to my face, as she lightly lifted the hair from my forehead.

"You are young enough for me to take such a liberty," she said; "and to tell you the truth I am afraid for you to loose your hold of that vicious creature. I must have lost my strength, and my nerve too," she added, wistfully; "I remember when no horse could conquer me."

"That was when you were in the saddle, madam."

"Yes. May I ask where you are staying; so few people come down here. You have come from London? I beg your pardon; you will think my questions very impertinent."

Did I feel proud at this tacit acknowledgment of something which had been first suggested to me by Mr. Ravel on that day when we stood together talking of my mother? Perhaps I did hope to be a gentleman, to be recognised for what I was, and to be *that*

which earned the recognition; I thank heaven that I gave one slight proof that my dear master's teaching and example were not altogether in vain. That best gentleman that I have ever known, named selfishness, meanness, and pretence, as the three deadly sins that blighted life and manners, and made men hateful and hating each other; and I dared not let that proud lady flatter me by her superficial error.

"I have lived at the schoolhouse six miles from here for a long time," I said; "but I scarcely wonder at your not hearing of me. I am the assistant of the schoolmaster; but I was once taught how to manage a horse. I am glad to have been able to turn that teaching to such account to-day."

She bowed as I took off my hat, and looked at me earnestly, as though she debated something within herself.

"May I beg you to add to the obligation which I cannot express?" she said, presently. "You have saved me and mine from a great danger. Do you think you could safely drive us home?"

I thought so; indeed, I had no doubt of it; and, as a waggon was coming along the road, and would pass my own house in an hour or so, I asked the man to stop his team and hold the horse's head, while I scribbled a pencil note to Mr. Waine, which he promised faithfully to deliver, especially as I had written outside, "Please give the bearer a pot of beer." I had no money; for, indeed, I had just spent my savings for the suit of clothes I wore.

How well I remembered that long, low house, as I

drove up to the front gate beside its haughty mistress! the heir of it and all its belongings pressing close to my side, and asking me to stay and have some dinner with him. There was the low balcony round which I had crept on that wild, wet night. If ever she should come to know what I had seen, and that I knew what paper she had wanted to find in the dead man's hand, but missed so narrowly because the hand was clutched beneath him! I almost sickened as I thought of these things; for I felt faint; and, now that the excitement was over, I knew that I was shaken, and a pain came in my shoulder, so that I could scarcely hold the reins. I remembered the house so well, and yet it seemed as though some kind of decay had settled on it—it looked meaner, not smaller, but shabbier, as though the fortunes of the place had waned, and the very bricks and mortar sympathised with family reverses. Most of the windows were blinded, too, as though few rooms were used; and, as I turned the horse's head along the carriage drive, the turf and gravel looked weedy and neglected, as though no gardener tended them. The door was open, and in the wide hall stood a gentleman, who was coming out. His back was towards us for a moment, as he put on a light overcoat, and took a stick from a rack against the wall; but when he came into the light, and waited on the step for a moment, I knew him.

Mr. Oswald Fairhoe! But how strangely changed! the fair, silky hair greyed and thinned; the slender, graceful figure stouter, and with stooping shoulders;

the fair face blotched with vinous patches on the cheeks. As he stood there, listless and dull-eyed, but with a gesture that still spoke of a lingering grace, to hand out his wife, who, disregarding his proffered help, sprang lightly down, and turned to lift her child from the carriage-step, I thought he looked like the house —all blurred and faded, and almost deformed by some deadly blight, effectual alike on timber, stones, and men.

"Did you hire a carriage, madam? This looks like our chaise, I think," he said, looking from Mrs. Fairhoe to me, as I alighted.

"Would you like me to take the horse to the stable, or can I find the groom?" I interposed, feeling more awkward than I had felt before, as not seeing clearly how to take my leave.

"I hope I shall be able to prevail on you to come in, and, as we dine in an hour, that you will stay to dinner with us," she replied. "This gentleman has saved us from broken bones at least," she added, to her husband; "for that vicious brute ran away when I tried to turn him, and I never could have held him in. I really think I'm losing all nerve and courage, Oswald."

He turned, and looked at her so curiously as she said this, and there was such a half-surprised expression in his face, that I fancied she seldom addressed him by his Christian name. The look of pain—it might almost have been called subdued agony—that had shocked me when I saw him first on the step of the door, went away for a moment.

"I was afraid Gip was not well broken," he replied; "he always looked vicious."

"That's why I took a fancy to him perhaps," she retorted, with a hard laugh.

The look of pain came back again, but he turned towards me and removed his hat. "I hope you will stay and give me an opportunity of trying to express my thanks," he said, with such a refined courtesy that it seemed as though some spirit of his former self had animated him for a time. "I was going out," he continued, turning to Mrs. Fairhoe again; "but I will remain now. I have work to do to-morrow that will require all my strength, Caroline; and, more than all, I must go to Fairhoe Wood and see that place that I have not visited since the morning when we were there together, how many years ago?"

"What matters how many?" she replied, with a fixed, weary look. "Too few to weaken the remembrance of it between us, it would seem; and therefore not many enough for either. We shall both be old before that mystery is cleared up, why revive it now more than at any other time?"

"I don't know—at least—I beg your pardon; I do know, but I cannot let you share my knowledge. I take it for granted that I cannot; but I will at least see the place once more. Strange evidences turn up; and I have had such hints and threats lately that I must take some steps, even though it should kill me."

"Hints! threats! Of what, and from whom?"

"Did I say that? Ah! Imaginary of course—from my own dark thoughts. I said nothing about

anybody, did I? If I did, let it pass. I shall never be myself again."

She turned from him with an expression of impatience,—of contempt; and, telling me she would send a servant to show me a room where I should find towels and hot water, took her little boy by the hand and swept up the stairs, where she seemed to vanish in the twilight that had just begun to fall upon the great landing above.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGE COMPANY.

I FOLLOWED a woman-servant up the same staircase to a room, where she had brought hot water and towels, and where a pair of lighted candles stood on an old oak dressing-table with an oval black-framed looking-glass. A great bare bedstead of carved wood stood in this room, which seemed to be out of use; the walls were panelled, and the chimneypiece was high and heavy. This much I could see by the light that came through the narrow diamond-paned windows, and I somehow felt confused and strange.

What did all this mean? and what did my presence in that house portend? Was I on the eve of some strange discovery; or were my senses playing me false, and causing me to mingle common events with my own wandering fancies? I had no time to frame any coherent speculations by an endeavour to put together the links of thought that yet seemed in some confused way to make one chain if I could only fit them in their proper order. In making the attempt they all fell asunder again, and left me with the impression that they were but coincident fancies.

A white-headed old gentleman, dressed in rather

ill-fitting black, and with a dingy neckcloth, stood at the door and asked me if I would please to come to dinner.

We were, perhaps, a little too punctual after all, for no one was in the drawing-room when I entered. I heard from the old butler that this was the drawing-room, and that we should dine there, as Mrs. Fairhoe preferred it to the dining-room when they were alone or only had one guest, as being more comfortable An oval table was handsomely set out with glass and silver, lighted by wax candles in strange twisted branches, other candles were on the chimneypiece in crystal lustres, and a bright wood fire burnt upon the broad hearth, and threw an extra gleam over the apartment.

I had never been in such a handsome room before; my feet made no sound on the thick, soft carpets; rare cabinets stood in the niches of the wall, filled with old china, carved ivory, and objects of strange workmanship; carpet, walls, and hangings were all blended in one soft harmony of colour, and a delicate scent pervaded the air—the scent of rose-leaves, which were stored just as my dear master stored them, but in jars of exquisite porcelain. It was my first experience of luxury and refinement with the means for their indulgence, and I felt the influence of both as I stood examining the contents of one of the cabinets nearest to the lighted candles. I don't know from what train of thought I was disturbed by a little hand that suddenly stole into mine and a little face that looked up at me; I had heard nobody come in, and probably the door

had been left partly open; but little Oswald, washed and brushed and dressed for dinner, in a suit of dark velvet, had come to my side unnoticed, and had silently reminded me of his presence. He was a beautiful boy, very fair and fragile, but with his mother's hair, and with great dark brown wistful eyes that seemed to question the face into which they looked, bespeaking confidence and searching for a reason that their own trust should be given in exchange.

"You will come and teach me, won't you?" he said, presently. "Mamma said she would ask you." He spoke with wonderful distinctness, and in a clear, plaintive little voice, "and I told her I could learn of you; I can read now in my picture-book. Aunt Gabriel taught me to read in it, and I know all about animals and these things in the cabinets. I can tell you about some of them: shall I?"

So, he prattling on and I listening, we went together, hand-in-hand, round the great drawing-room. When Mrs. Fairhoe, followed by her husband, came in, he saw the little fellow was sitting on my knee on a low footstool by the fire—in the very core of the light. I didn't know what made Mr. Fairhoe start back and draw his hand across his forehead, but he did so, although he recovered himself instantly. I noticed that he went to a side buffet and drank some brandy before coming to the table. His wife looked at him with a sudden frown as he poured out the liquor, but she turned towards us again with something like a smile upon her face.

"I have been telling Oswald that I hope we shall be

able to persuade you to come here and be his tutor," she said, as she lifted the child down and placed him on a chair at the table. "How would that suit with your other engagements?"

I scarcely knew how to answer. What would be the end of all this, and what would Mr. Waine say? I thought of Mr. Ravel, and began to wonder again. She waited for my reply.

"I scarcely know," I said. "I could come, perhaps, two or three times a week for a few hours, but I must first ask Mr. ——, my master." I had nearly mentioned his name, when it flashed upon me that in that name lay the secret which might be the hidden blight upon them both. I turned hot and cold, and she must have noticed some change in my face, for she said, quickly, "I fear you are not well. You did not hurt yourself to-day, I hope."

"Oh, he's hurt his poor arm so very badly, Mamma!" cried the little fellow by my side. "It was all through that nasty Gipsy running away. He's a very naughty horse, and I won't ride with him again."

Mr. Fairhoe begged that I would stay for the night, and repeated his invitation so earnestly, and so manifestly with the approval of his wife—who seemed, however, to wonder at his cordiality—that I felt bound to consent.

The dinner, plain, but elegantly served and well cooked, passed off with little further conversation until the wine was placed upon the table. Then Mrs. Fairhoe began to talk about books, now and then

referring to her husband, but in a way which seemed to say, "Etiquette demands that I should recognise your presence, else would I leave you unnoticed." He spoke little, sitting back in his chair, and, as I noticed, helping himself freely to the wine, of which no one else drank more than a glass or two. Conversation soon flagged, and, but for little Oswald, who sat beside me, delighted at my skill in transforming nuts, and apples, and plum-stones into animals, it would have been a dull evening. How strange it was that these tricks, learnt among the gipsies in the woods, should stand me in such stead! How strange everything was! I started more than once at some word or look of Mr. Fairhoe, as he sat there sipping his wine, and growing more and more moody as he drank, and yet I could not tell what had startled me. Was it some undefined foreshadowing of what I soon must learn? was it an echo in my heart that responded to his voice, or did the thought of that girl who had been "taken away,"—that wife of his who had perished at sea—haunt me as I looked from him to the proud handsome lady opposite, and from both to their child whose little hand fondled my cheek?

It was soon time for the little fellow to go to bed, and he went to his nursemaid contentedly enough when he was assured that I would see him in the morning. Then Mrs. Fairhoe, asking me if I liked music, bade me draw my chair up to the fire, and she would play to me. It was another thing to be wondered at that this haughty lady should make me an honoured guest. But I explained it to myself by considering that she was

in this way showing her sense of what she was pleased to consider a great service. I noticed, also, that she only asked me if I liked music, and, when I said that indeed I did, she went at once to the piano. There was just that difference of age and station between us which would make this natural to her. I liked music, and she would play to me. You cannot fail to admire, she seemed to say: this at least will be something out of your common experience; for, though I assume that you are a gentleman, you are, after all, only a schoolmaster—though you sit here as an invited guest, you are little past the schoolboy age.

But I had listened almost daily to music higher and better than any she could make, skilful as her long, soft, taper fingers were; and full of a sort of sparkling effect as were the pieces she selected, they suggested nothing to my thoughts. The tones filled the room; the sound was continuous; but the music itself did not speak.

Mr. Fairhoe had drawn up his easy chair to the opposite side of the fireplace. I thought he had been dozing dreamily before he did so, for he sat with his elbow on the table, his forehead resting on his hand. Happening to look up for a moment from the little boy, however, I found that he was peering at me intently, unconsciously, perhaps, and with an anxious face. Then he started back, put his hair back from his temples, pushed away the wine with some whispered exclamation to himself, and drew back from the table.

The brilliant music went on, and as I sat looking at

the light, feathery, wood ashes falling in the grate, and watched the red sparks chasing each other till they died out, to be followed by a fresh train, I again thought he had fallen asleep, when he suddenly leaned forward in his chair and placed his hand upon my wrist.

"You have done a service to me and mine which I cannot easily repay," he said; "and, like all debtors in that respect, I want you to add to my obligations."

I said I should be glad to serve him in whatever way lay in my power.

"I wish you to ride out with me to-morrow, where I do not care to go alone. I need a companion."

I answered that I would willingly go with him, but that I must return to the school by noon.

"Then will you meet me in this room at eight o'clock? and we can breakfast and start at once. You shall be driven home in the chaise afterwards. Stay, can you ride? I mean, I heard that you had hurt your shoulder. Could you ride a quiet pony? And I will order my horse to be saddled, so that we may lose no time in getting to the place I speak of."

It is well that he did not see my face as he said these last words, but only slightly pressed my hand in answer to my reply that I would be ready at eight o'clock, and sank back again in the deep, low chair. He must really have fallen asleep then, and I sat there I know not how long, conscious of no consecutive thought, but with fancies innumerable confused rather than shaped and harmonised by the music which still went on. Suddenly the measure changed. Mrs. Fairhoe had, perhaps, in turning over the leaves of her book come

upon some old-fashioned tune, or, at all events, upon one of a character very different to those to which we had been listening. The notes fell softly, a hushed tone seemed to be substituted for loud assertion, a sweet, plaintive melody stirred a new feeling within me, and I turned a little to listen. The fire fell together, so that a fitful blaze shone across the hearth, and by its light I saw that Mr. Oswald Fairhoe had waked, and with a face all strangely moved and with trembling limbs, sat staring at me as though I formed a real part of some troubled dream.

He struggled into complete wakefulness, looked hurriedly about him, and, with a shudder, crouched back in his chair again as the music ceased with a low melodious wail and Mrs. Fairhoe rose from the piano. "There, I have played almost through my repertoire," she said, as she came and stood before the fire. "You are duller than ever, I think, to-night," she added to her husband, with a glance of scarcely-concealed contempt. "What new whim is it that takes you to that place to-morrow? It would be better to let the past alone."

"No whim," he replied, rousing himself and speaking in a louder tone than I had yet heard him use. "No whim; but a terrible necessity. I tell you, Caroline, it is useless to make you a party to it; let me bear it alone. We cannot look at it from the same point of view. Why do you always harp upon this one string?"

She looked at him with gathering anger and a face so changed in all its hardening lineaments that it

shocked me to see it. Neither she nor her husband heeded me, however; they seemed to have struck upon a topic that obliterated their sense of my presence, and she turned upon him, almost fiercely.

"I harp upon it!" she cried. "I harp, when every day your moody temper and the secret that you will have between us bring fresh torture to me. I tell you, let the matter lie hidden in the past between us as much as either of us may hope for such relief. If we cannot have confidence, at least let us mutually help to make the grave that, if it buries love in it, shall also bury something that else will destroy even the last vestiges of self-respect and mutual forbearance. You will not tell me what I seek to know—what I have sought, having a right to know, for all the years of our married life. You promised to tell me what was your real relation to her whose name I first heard from your own mother, and you altered your mind, for some reason or for no reason. What if I strove to find out what you refused to tell from the man who could have told me no more than I had a right to learn? The search gave me more misery than it ever gave to you, even in that most meanly jealous temper by which you degraded me in your thoughts"——

"I degrade you?—what did I see?" he retorted, sullenly. "Did I see him in that place on that very morning? Had I not seen enough to make me do that which another did before my face?"

"You saw him, hateful hind that he was, seek to degrade me by the knowledge that he possessed, which you also must have possessed, and yet which you re-

fused to give me then and afterwards; you saw me repulse him, and in my heart I too could have done that which was done before *my* face."

"Yes, and I am accused of it."

"You! you!"

I thought she would have fallen, she turned so deadly pale, and clutched at the chimneypiece for support, where she stood swaying to and fro, and looking fearfully into the fire.

He had risen hurriedly, and stood beside her, with more of energy and purpose in his face than it seemed capable of expressing a minute before.

"Yes," he said, in a low, steady tone; "there is a man who was there that day and witnessed everything."

"I am your witness, Oswald," she said, presently, with a sudden softening in her face. "Though I sought to learn what this girl was to you, and I *will* justify myself for all I did in that respect, I am your witness."

He stood and looked at her with a heaving breast, slowly took her hand and kissed it. It may have been my fancy, but I thought a great change came upon his face, as though a cloud had lifted from it.

"Thank you for that one word, Caroline," he said; "and would to God that I was not the broken wretch I am! Your evidence is more to me than if it could weigh in law against that man's. Now you can guess why I wish to see whether that place is as it was when last I visited it, no matter how short a time ago."

She gave him no answer, but stood almost motionless, watching the dying embers of the fire. He had sunk into his chair again, and sat with his head bowed in his hands, his hair all tossed and disordered.

I should have gone quietly to the door that I might ask Mr. James to bring me a candle and show me to my bed-room; but Mrs. Fairhoe saw me—perhaps noticed my reflection in the narrow chimney-glass above, and started, with rather a scared, uneasy look upon her face. She turned and held out her hand to me. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Good-night!" she said. "I shall meet you at breakfast; but I wish you could promise me now that you will be Oswald's tutor. May I not call and endeavour to arrange the matter with Mr. ——, Mr. what? You have not told me the gentleman's name?"

I was glad that I stood in the shadow of the door, or I should have shown the confusion which her question occasioned. "Mr. James Waine will make no objection, I think, madam," I answered; "but I cannot do anything without his consent."

She darted a swift glance towards her husband; but if he had heard our conversation he seemed not to have noted it.

"Waine?" she repeated in a whisper, as she came towards the door. "Do you know anything of his family: has he relations hereabout? You yourself do not belong to them, do you?"

"I know one of his relations—Mr. Scarthey. He

married Mr. Scarthey's sister. It was Mr. Scarthey who placed me at school with him."

"Mr. Scarthey is your guardian, then?"

"Yes."

She stood considering for a moment, then held out her hand again.

"Not in the oak-room, James: no one can sleep there, I'm sure," she said to the old butler, as he appeared in answer to the bell. "Tell nurse to see that the chintz-room is ready. Mrs. Gabriel was there only a week ago, so no evil influences will have power," she added to herself. Then, seeing that I had heard her, she said, with a faint smile, "Don't think that the oak-room or any room is haunted. You're not afraid of ghosts, I dare say; and even in the old coppice, the only place of which a ghost story was ever told, the spectres' tree has been sawn down long ago, and the spectres themselves vanished when it was cut up for firewood. Good-night, and may you have pleasant dreams—or, better still, no dreams at all!"

I could not tell whether she was jesting or speaking with a sort of vague seriousness. She seemed to be trying to speak lightly and yet with a meaning in her words that she all the time applied to something in her thoughts about herself.

The chintz-room, to which I was escorted by a woman servant, was named from the pretty, old-fashioned hangings that enlivened it, and seemed to occupy a nook in the passage beyond the door of the larger and more gloomy apartment with which I had already made

acquaintance. I scarcely know what prompted me—perhaps the cheerful look of the room itself—but I turned to the woman, who was staring at me as though I was myself something supernatural, and asked her if she knew what was the old story of the haunted path in the coppice.

"Oh! good gracious mercy me, my dear young gentleman! whatever have you been a-dreamin' of?" she replied, evasively. "Don't you go on that way, or else you'll get quite feverish, and I shall have to go an' ask mother for a jorum of her harb tea, as is coolin' and does a world o' good if took either fastin' or at bed time."

"But there is a story, isn't there? There's nothing seen now, I know; at least Mrs. Fairhoe told me so; and I don't believe there ever was, except, perhaps, some old tree-stump. I've seen such spectres in the wood many a time. What was that one like?"

"Well, lor, you are sich a strange young gentleman that I shouldn't wonder if you was to keep awake a-thinking of it, if I warn't to tell you. Folks used to say as there was two parties, brothers, I think they was, as one of them went out of a arrand, and the other waited for him, a-layin' in a hambuscade under that tree, and put him out o' the way, or else they fought, as was never rightly know'd which; but, at all events, one on 'em was killed; and that afterwards there used to be seen two figgers a-strugglin'—as one lay quite frustrated with a blow as the other gave him; but it's my opinion as it was nothing but that there old

tree, as they will get twisted to a'most anything you like to fancy."

"I think so too, ma'am. Good-night!"

"Good-night to you, sir; and if you *would* see my mother, Mrs. Purley, afore you go in the mornin' she'd take it a favior, I do assure you; as she says it's like a novel and better than a play as nobody knows the end on but them as sees for theirselves."

There was no time to ask her meaning, for she backed out instantly, keeping her eyes fixed on me till the door completely closed upon her. I felt uncomfortably conscious of being a mystery, and there were so many mysteries already claiming my attention that I might as well have occupied the great bare bed in the dim oak chamber as that snug little couch surrounded by gay hangings which just shut out the light of the candle from my eyes, but yet seemed to have no shadows of their own.

I could not sleep; or if for a moment I lost myself in a confused dream, I started broad awake again with all my faculties alive and eager, as though they had to meet some sudden emergency. The candle had gone out, and my watch had stopped, when I at last got out of bed and, by the faint light that shone between the curtains from the fast-waning moon, looked out of the window. There, beyond the garden, lay the very coppice of which I had been hearing; its larger trees hiding their feet in the tangled undergrowth, except near one broad path, where at some time an effectual clearance had been made. Upon an open space at some distance, where the path widened, the light fell

more certainly; and there, as I lived, I saw the figures of two men struggling, or at least contending, together. I felt my heart throb and my limbs grow cold—no wonder, perhaps, as I was standing there half-dressed; but I turned from the window to correct what I thought was a mere fancy. No. There they stood, again; and, as I strained my eyes to look at them, one of the two broke away and left the other lying on the ground.

I sat there watching until the day had fully dawned, then drew aside the curtains to let in the welcome sunlight; and after sousing my head and face in cold water, dressed by slow stages, between which I was continually peering through the window pane that gave me a view of the bare, broad space in the coppice. No one was astir when I at last went down into the drawing-room, and softly drew up one of the blinds, that I might sit and look out towards the road in front of the house. I took a gaily-bound book from a side table and tried to read; but the words had no meaning for me, or shaped themselves into other words bearing some disordered reference to my thoughts. What strange suspicions also shaped themselves into probabilities as I stood there I scarcely knew; but one wild fancy came upon me with a sudden shock. For a moment I seemed to have found the missing link in that broken chain which I had been striving to put together ever since I had first come within the walls of this blighted house. I had asked myself, how it came about that I, the mere waif and stray of unknown parentage—the child who had been cast adrift to find

a gipsy protector—should have been thrown amongst these people—my own little mystery of life hitched on to their mystery. Who were the "friends" of whom Rory Lee had spoken so long ago? and what did they know, or seek to know, concerning me? What threat had the gipsy held over Mr. Oswald Fairhoe? and how could it come to pass that he should assert so strange an influence over him? and——Who was I, and why did Mr. Ravel enjoin me to be so patient when I asked him that question? Then it came—— that swift, overpowering suggestion, so startling in its force that it might have been spoken in my ear with even less effect—"His son and hers——hers who was taken away to die; who left you, in her agony of shame and remorse, and yet died loving you, perhaps."

A broad golden gleam of sunlight came upon the book that I still held in my hand, and woke me from that wild dream—served to banish the delusion which had taken possession of me for a moment. And yet it would not be banished. I knew that when I was once more alone I should be going over and over again through the train of fancies which had led me to that unreal suggestion. I must urge my dear master to tell me something to still the unquiet spirit within me; and, failing that, I would beg for a holiday, that I might go to London and see Mr. Ravel. Any certainty would be better than the restless questioning that could neither be silenced nor satisfied.

I say the sunlight, falling like a radiant angel of truth, served to clear away these night-spun cobwebs of

my brain—though they were cobwebs that had gathered round some real object—and I threw the curtain back that I might raise the window and let in air as well. As I stood with its heavy folds gathered in my hand, I saw a man striding along the road. He was partly hidden by the shrubs until he reached the stone pillars that supported the wide iron entrance-gate of the carriage-drive; but as he came to that place, he turned and shook his clenched hand at the house, as though he cursed it.

I knew that even those bright, snakelike eyes could not see me where I stood; and yet he was the man of all others, who could resolve my doubt. "Rory!" I shouted, "Rory!" but before I could unfasten the catch of the window, he had gone on at the same swift pace. Mrs. Fairhoe met me as I darted to the door.

"Were you calling for anything?" she said, in some surprise, as I almost ran against her. "How early you have risen. I fear you must have rested very ill to be awake so soon; and you look pale."

There was something so gentle in her tone, so pitying, almost tender in her look, that it took me more by surprise than her sudden entrance had done. It is, perhaps, one of the greatest of all the influences that women of that hard, haughty, handsome type possess, when they can melt and soften into gentleness. The change that comes over them is so great that it seems to acquire power from what it supersedes.

"While you are away this morning, I am going to drive—no, the lad shall drive me—to your school; you can tell me where it is, and I shall be back before

noon. I have a fancy to negotiate with Mr. Waine for your coming here to teach my little fellow, who has set his heart upon it. There will be nothing disagreeable to you in my doing so, I hope?"

"Mr. Waine will have no objection, I am sure," I replied, presently; "and it would be better, perhaps, if you took that trouble."

She touched her lips lightly with her finger as her husband came in, followed by a servant with the breakfast-tray.

"How is your shoulder this morning?" he asked me, as we took our seats. "I fear I shall tax your goodness too far by asking you to accompany me; but I must go, even though I go alone. When I return I shall give orders to have that spot dug up for twenty yards all round, if need be," he added in an undertone, speaking to his wife.

There were two pale faces gazing at each other very earnestly; but a new expression had come upon one of them. Mr. Fairhoe looked desperately determined; his mouth was rigid; his brows were knit. There was a painful effort in every lineament, like that of a man who fights against odds, but is about to sell his life dearly.

"I cannot let this matter rest longer," he muttered, presently, "or I shall leave it as a dreadful legacy to my child. Come, I will order a quiet pony; and we will go at once."

"I'd rather ride Gipsy," I said, quickly. "I'm quite able to manage him, and he wants breaking. Let me take him instead."

Mrs. Fairhoe thanked me with her eyes; and—shall I confess it? Well, yes; it was but a freak of weak, boyish vanity. When I afterwards saw that lady standing at the window to watch us mount, I sprang into the saddle gipsy fashion, without touching the stirrup, and let the vicious horse rear and prance before I cantered down the gravel drive, and pulled up steadily in the road.

Nature and art differ most in these two things—that nature changes while art remains unaltered; and that art improves, while nature is ever perfect. I should, perhaps, have remembered Grundon High-street or Covent Garden Market, very well indeed, but I had forgotten the aspect of those wooded patches with which I had once been tolerably familiar. Even when we came to that narrow path which led to the spot visited so often in dreams, and remembered now with a strongly-beating heart, I should not have recognised it but for my companion checking his horse, and waiting for me to come up. There was only room to ride singly, and I was a few yards behind him. "Would you mind walking the rest of the way?" he said, almost in a whisper (he had not spoken before during the journey); "there is the place just beyond that tall tree; you may not have noticed that tree, perhaps, for it has grown to six times the size it was then. I have been thus far before, many and many a day; and yet, fool, weak fool, that I am, I never could go on." He spoke in a low, quivering tone, as though he might be overheard or might disturb some one sleeping close at hand. When we had secured our horses to a rough stake or two left

behind at some former time by the woodcutters, who had, perhaps, spread an awning there, he grasped my arm, and we both went up the path in silence.

I recognised the place then. There were the clumps of wood and the broken ground, by which the murdered man had come that morning; here was the very spot where he had turned to meet Mrs. Fairhoe; there the thicket whence Rory Lee had sprung to face Orwood; yes, and there, still crumbling to decay, a mere stump of touchwood, was the tree where I looked down and heard that wild cry, that heavy fall.

A few more steps and we were on the rising ground, now skirted with straggling briars, which we must scramble through before we could reach the place on which the dead man had lain amongst the autumn leaves. I spied an opening farther on, and we went together, parting the few branches that stretched across the gap. Suddenly Mr. Fairhoe's grasp on my arm tightened, and he gave a low, startled cry. Straight before us, on the very spot that we had come to seek, there lay the body of a man, face downward, the arms extended, and the hands clasped together.

Mr. Fairhoe looked at me piteously, as though he feared his senses had deserted him. "What do you see there?" he said. "I can't trust myself; it must be some strange delusion, surely. It can't; it *cannot* be that——"

"Come and see," I replied. "Let us go together."

I will tell the truth. I was afraid to go alone, though it was broad daylight, and the sun shone brightly on every leaf and spray.

I broke through the slight boughs, and Mr. Fairhoe followed me, as though he, too, could not be left alone. It seemed only a second of time before we were looking fearfully down at that motionless form; but in that second I had recognised it, partly, perhaps, by some peculiarity in the dress; more by the long straggling, yellow hair; the frame worn almost to a skeleton; the undefinable something which pervades a figure that has grown familiar to us.

Though my last thought of it had been one of kindness and gratitude, this figure had been terribly familiar to me years before. It was that of Orwood.

And yet that undefinable something had left it, and there was nothing in its place. There was no life there. It was a figure, and nothing more. The soul had passed out of it; and vengeance, remorse, terror, and the dreadful yearning which had led him to that place.

We were not sure of this at first. We looked at each other, not knowing what to do, until, overcoming the horror that seemed to hold me spellbound, I stooped and touched the clasped hands.

"Help me to turn him," I said to Mr. Fairhoe; "this is the very man himself."

"The very man! what man?" he cried, wildly. "Don't trifle with me, boy! What man?"

"The man who shot Harrick. His name is Orwood. Help me, I say. He may be living yet."

I had not thought what I was saying, and when I looked at him he only stared at me with wild eyes, and shouted "Help! help!" in a tone that echoed amidst the trees.

I thought he had gone mad suddenly; but I had no time to speak to him, for his call was answered, at some distance lower down, amidst a great crashing of branches.

"Who called for help?—is it you, Orwood?" said a voice that was familiar to me. "I am coming—I am coming;" and presently Mr. Scarthey broke through the tangled hedge, and ran along the path.

"Oh! Mr. Scarthey," I cried, as I went to meet him; "come here, come here. He has been drawn to this place at last, as he said he should be, and to die."

"I know it, boy. I followed him all night, and before daybreak we met, and I tried to stay him; but he broke away from me, and even threatened me, like a madman, that he would strike me down if I came between him and this last purpose. It was useless to strive with him, for we were in the wood, by the great house yonder; and so I let him go—could not prevent it, indeed—and only followed as I best might, and too late—too late! Has he killed himself? But what brings you here, boy? I was at my brother's last night, after a weary journey, and he told me of the strange accident that had taken you to Fairhoe."

Mr. Fairhoe came up at the moment.

"This is Mr. Fairhoe," I said; "and he will tell you why he brought me here this morning. This is Mr. Scarthey, sir."

"What! your father—your guardian—the friend of whom you spoke to my wife?"

I saw a faint flush come into that scarred face as

my friend heard these words; but he stood looking a little askance at my companion, waiting for him to speak.

"I am glad, indeed, to meet you here, sir," said Mr. Fairhoe, raising his hat, and with the same painful expression of set purpose that I had noticed an hour or two before. "You can help me to do justice, and at the same time relieve me from the weight of a shameful charge—the burden of a false accusation. You knew this wretched man?"

"Yes, I did, indeed; but what of that?"

"You knew his enemy, too, I think; the man that should lie here, and for whose grave I must have a strict search made—James Harrick, who was killed so long ago by that hand that I have but this moment touched?"

Mr. Scarthey shuddered, as though a sudden chill had struck him. "You accused of—of—the murder of your steward," he said; "by whom? I thought it was known only to one other than those who stand here now."

"To my wife, but also to a man whose name you perhaps have never heard."

"I did not mean your—the lady you mention," returned Mr. Scarthey, looking at me with a strange surprise and wonder. "I forgot that she, too, saw that deed done. I must do justice, whatever comes of it," he muttered; "I cannot understand it, and I will not, for no good can come of such a scheme."

The man who lies there believed me when I told him that I would not betray him in his lifetime, and

said that when the dark end came a confession might be found upon him at his death. "Is he dead?" he added, with a sudden, fearful look. "He may have fallen here, faint with want and sickness."

Without waiting for an answer, he stooped down and raised the body from the place where it lay, so gaunt and rigid that, though it was little more than the skeleton of a man, it took all his strength to turn it with the wan set face towards the sky. When he had closed the eyes and vainly tried to unlock those clenched hands, he stood gazing at it, with his own features convulsed by the terrible conflict that tore him. I heard him groan, and knew how bitter were the thoughts that linked him with the memory of the murderer and of him who had been the object of their mutual hate. He stooped down presently and took a folded paper from the dead man's dress.

"I might have been in that man's place," he said at last, in a slow, even voice, and taking off his hat. "I might have done what he did and should have thought it less a crime than he thought it; for he who brought his doom upon himself had wronged us both in mere devilish wilfulness. May God forgive us all! for who can tell which of us may need forgiveness most?"

Mr. Fairhoe seemed about to speak, checked himself, and then, by some sudden impulse, seized Mr. Scarthey's hand.

"There is only one thing to be done now," he said, in a rapid tone, as though he strove against some weakness which he could scarcely master. "You have there

the means of clearing this terrible mystery. I am a magistrate; but I will not look at the writing that may be there until another magistrate has seen it. Come, come with me to Grundon at once; or, rather, come to my house first, that you may eat and drink, and we will drive there together."

Mr. Scarthey started. "No," he said, "I cannot come to your house; I cannot enter it. I will go to Grundon with you now, if you will, but nowhere else."

"Why?"

"You must excuse me. I cannot be your guest. Let the lad here ride on, and have a chaise got ready if you will. We can meet it in the road; and Valentine," he added to me, "lose no time in going back to my brother. Say that I shall be with him this afternoon; and you be in the way, too; I have something to tell you both."

CHAPTER IX.

BLUE WATER AND BLACK FACES.

WHATEVER may have been the steps taken, the matter of the murder was soon set at rest. The remains of the steward, found by the men set to dig about the old withered tree, were placed in a shell and buried in a corner of Grundon churchyard. The body of Orwood was taken, at midnight, to the cross roads by the Bend Farm, and there put into a grave, at which only three men attended—Mr. Fairhoe, Mr. Scarthey, and my master, who insisted on accompanying his brother-in-law.

I had begun to feel very sad and lonely, for there was a secret, now, between me and the two best friends I had ever known—to whom I owed all that made life itself of value. I had found my dear master depressed and anxious on the night of my return from Fairhoe; and though I had confided to him all that had happened, and even such of my wild imaginings as could be put into words, he sat there quite silent, regarding me with a sorrowful interest.

"Don't seek to know any more than you know already, my boy," he said at last. "You will have only a short time to wait, and then Mr. Ravel will be here.

It must all rest with him. That poor lady who was here this morning came to find out some secret, which if she discovers it, will blight her life, and which I would keep from her if I could, at any cost or suffering to myself. I think there are some hidden things that had better never be revealed in this world. I almost regret that I agreed to let you go to teach that bright little boy; but the mother's heart seemed some way set upon it. God only knows why, since it can bring her only pain in the end; but then, God *does* know, and perhaps it is a necessary pain for her and may work for good."

"How can my going there give her pain?" I asked. "She herself wished it, her husband wishes it, and I myself feel a strange interest in being in that house, though it seems to be full of dreadful or depressing influences that weigh upon me and keep me from breathing freely within its walls."

"Did I say that it would give her pain?" he replied, colouring. "I was talking less to you than to myself, Valentine. You believe that I am your friend, my boy, don't you?"

"I do, indeed," I cried, kissing his hand, "the best friend next to Mr. Scarthey that I ever had, or hope to have, or even wish to have."

"Then you will not press me to tell you all you want to know for another month or two. I must see Mr. Ravel in London, and if he does not give me leave I will take it upon myself to say what I believe must be told you very soon. Within a month this secret will be cleared up; but we must wait for letters that

are long in coming, or for a messenger, who may never come at all."

Mr. Scarthey was greatly opposed to my going as little Oswald's tutor. The air of that house was not healthy for me, he said; but as his brother-in-law had promised, and I should be there only twice a week, I might be none the worse.

On the following week I paid my first visit in my new capacity; but I soon discovered that I was regarded more as a friend than as a teacher, not only by my little pupil but by the parents, between whom some new, and, as I hoped, better, feeling seemed to have grown out of the strange events that were even then engaging Mr. Fairhoe's attention at Grundon. He still wore that eager look of settled, painful purpose, while she had appeared to droop. The hard lineaments of her face had softened, and, though its new expression was rather that of haughty pride abased than of loving confidence, there was unwonted gentleness in her tone, quiet in her movements, and a sort of depressed calm in voice and gesture, as though she had a hidden burden on her heart that she must bear without striving to cast it from her. Her whole manner was changed; so changed that I could scarcely dissociate it from the sudden development of some wearing malady that slowly but surely sapped the springs of life. Had her husband told her all, then? I thought so, for she never again alluded to that cold secret that had once stood between them. It kept them apart no longer for the few weeks that came after that great shock and surprise that had waked Oswald

Fairhoe from his lethargy. They would sometimes look at each other silently, as they sat there before the fire in the long drawing-room after dinner (there was always an evening fire in that room), and then a melancholy, wistful smile would steal over both their faces, and he would take her hand in his, and their chairs would be somehow drawn closer together. I think they both felt more of what the love of their married life should have been in that brief space of time of which I speak than they had known in all the years that had passed since they bent together over the little one with whom I was playing or talking about the curiosities that had been taken from the cabinets for his delight. As I saw them sitting there in the firelight, I wondered what was that bitter end to which my master had alluded, and wished that I had the power to avert it, or to keep from that once proud and still handsome woman any worse pang than those she must have felt already.

I had scarcely become familiar either with the alteration in Mrs. Fairhoe's manner or with my own position in that house when I was called away. On my return home one evening, not more than two months after my strange introduction, a letter awaited me from Mr. Ravel, saying that he himself would arrive on the following day to take me with him to London. He had heard of my new engagement, and told me frankly that it was the cause of his wishing me to leave the very neighbourhood of Fairhoe for a time. He was only waiting for letters from abroad, he said, and then he would be able to point out my future

prospects. Until then, anything that I could do might only have the effect of preventing all that he hoped to bring about.

Such confirmation as this gave to my vague surmises lost its full influence for the time. I was full of the anticipated change, wondering into what new society I should be thrown, and already ashamed of the avidity with which I looked forward to relief from that very life which had been the most blessed thing that could have happened to me before I heard these strange rumours, full of an uncertainty that destroyed my mental balance and filled me with vain hopes and ill-regulated wishes.

Thank Heaven, that at the moment of parting I said and felt that I would rather give up any future that was likely to await me than forget the loving kindness of the men who had saved and sheltered me when I was forlorn and friendless. Any future that could befal me would be an evil one if it separated me from them; and I could not feel ashamed of the tears that wetted my face when I saw how my departure affected my dear master.

"I don't know that you are going to any very good fortune, Valentine," he said; "but, whatever it may be, you will not let it make you mean or selfish, or other than you have been, unless it should make you better. Unless you master your fortune, whatever it may be, fortune will be your foe. No man ever yet was fortunate who did not first conquer fortune, good or evil; and perhaps that which we call good takes most fighting. One word, my boy: your father and

mother were married; and there is no dishonour in your birth. I thought it would comfort you to know that, when you have left here, you will learn all about it; but it wasn't safe while you were backward and forward at the very house."

"At the very house! What! you don't say that that lady—that Mrs. Oswald Fairhoe is my mother? It isn't possible."

"No; not she."

"Who, then?"

"My poor little kinswoman, Barbara Waine."

"And she was"——. I suppose my look was enough to finish the sentence, for the reply came instantly.

"Oswald Fairhoe's wife. You yourself say you saw the marriage certificate, and I have seen it since."

There were no tears on my face then. I seemed somehow to have been a boy till that moment—I was little more than eighteen—and then suddenly to have become a man.

What was it that was striving within me? Love? Revenge? Pleasure? Doubt? Pain? Something of all these, amidst which a momentary impulse seemed to urge me to Fairhoe, there to confront the man who had wronged my mother; the coward who could marry again while the memory of the wife, who had gone away to find a wild grave in the sea, was fresh and green, if he had ever loved her; the man of whom I must ask some question, demand some answer; he who had looked me in the face and had started in his

drunken dreams to mutter my mother's name; he who was my father.

I must have said something of all this, and perhaps my looks had changed with the new feeling that had sprung up within me; for I had my hand upon the gate, and was about to turn towards Fairhoe at once, when Mr. Ravel came swiftly out of the house, where he had been talking to Mr. Scarthey.

"I cannot go from here till I have seen him," I said. "Pray forgive me; but not all the waiting in the world will be of any avail if I cannot hear from his own lips what I must know. I will return if you wish it; but I am going now to Fairhoe, as I have the right to do."

"You have the right, certainly," said the barrister, very calmly, but with a manner that checked me for the moment. "I wish Mr. Waine had taken my advice, and left me to tell you of this when we were in London. You will pardon my reminding you that I have been for many weeks arranging how best to bring the knowledge of his own position to Mr. Oswald Fairhoe—to your father, remember—and yet to spare his wife the pang that, if she is the woman I take her for, will be her deathblow, as surely as we now stand here alive."

I had never till that moment thought of the little Oswald, my friend and pupil; had never realised that I—if I was indeed the son of that first marriage—was the heir of Fairhoe; and the thought filled me not with pleasure but with dismay.

I thought I saw a way out of that difficulty. "She

need be no party to our meeting," I said. "Let her child be as he would have been if I had never known what my birth was. That shall be no obstacle to my duty."

"Your duty!" retorted Mr. Ravel, flushing and speaking in a tone so different from his usual calm voice that I looked at him in surprise. "Who has told you that this is your duty? Come! you are not as old as I am, and I tell you that this is altogether out of your duty to those who have made themselves your guardians. Your mother must have a voice in the matter before you have any right to give up this or that advantage that you would never have discovered but for others who were born before you."

"Neither of us can hear that voice," I replied. "Do not mistake me, Mr. Ravel. I know now what I am; but I am no less grateful than I was when my only claim to pity was that of a starved, forsaken child. I make no other claim, now, than I should make if I were still a pauper boy, wondering where his mother had gone. It is because I think I hear her voice calling to me from the sea, where her body lies, that I must do this."

"Good Heaven! Mr. Waine, you would make a very bad lawyer—at least, I think you would; but I don't know. I thought you had told him all that I have told you within these two months. Your mother's voice is living, sir, and not dead; or, if it be, it is since her living fingers wrote this letter, and her woman's wilfulness made all that we can do of no avail,

though—Heaven forgive me!—she cannot leave her father."

"I wish she never could have left her son," murmured Mr. Waine, in such a low tone that I could not have heard him if every sense had not been strung up to its highest pitch.

I was amazed, speechless, and opened the letter which the barrister handed to me without a word. It was in answer to one just received, and full of that restrained fervour which belongs to a woman's letter on any matter combining sentiment and business. Even as I read it, the recollection flashed across me that Mr. Ravel had loved her; and—perhaps it was a part of that sadder manhood that had come upon me—I saw at once that she had never known it. This would account for the testy, but yet almost cynical tone with which he spoke of it. It touched an old scar upon his heart. The letter said how she could not come to England, for her father was only just able to go from his chair to the door; how he might die at any hour; and she could not, dared not, leave him.

"I thought that *he* would have come to me," it said; "but I knew long ago that that was all over, and I think my love for him died out at sea—that the great waste of waters quenched it. You may be mistaken after all; though Marion Rooke should know. She must be quite an elderly woman now, though I am older than she is by years of grief. I have always thought of my baby boy as dead—I thought of him so once when I was almost mad, and it comforted me, though I feared that it would be laid to my charge,

and now to hear that he is alive is so strange. Oh, how I wish he could have been with me here! But that would have meant so many impossible things. It would have meant that I was worthy to be a wife and mother, and that *he* was worthy to be a husband and father. Pray forgive me for thus intruding my private sorrows upon you. I have duties now which must be fulfilled. I dare not make my father's last days wretched, or leave him to die."

Then came a postscript.

"I will write to you again, but I must ask the advice of some friends here. It is so hard to know what is one's duty. Oh, my child! my child! how you will hate your mother!—better that we should never meet on earth."

"I must go to her," I said, as I gave him back the letter. "For months I have felt as though I must go away; do something, seek some change; for months my thoughts have been fixed upon the sea; ungrateful as it may seem to the best friend I have ever had in the world." I had no real words; but after grasping the hands of my two dear old friends, who walked with us to the gate, slowly followed to the chaise which Mr. Ravel had in waiting, that we might reach the branch road, where we were to wait for the London coach.

"Who is Marian Rooke?" I asked, when we had taken our seats behind the coachman and were whirling in a cloud of autumn dust on the road that I had tramped so wearily years before.

"She was the first person who took you from your

father and mother, and put you out to nurse," replied Mr. Ravel. "She is Mrs. Letsom now; she married a doctor, and I hope you will stay with them."

"Oh! it is she who left me on a doorstep after I was stolen from my nurse?"

"Stolen from your nurse! What, did Rory Lee tell you that? I scarcely thought he would have said as much."

I told my companion the whole history of that strange introduction to the house of which I should have been the prospective master, and, as I went on, could see that he was lost in thought. "It's well you did not go as you intended," he said; "the evidence is complete enough, if we should need any; but I must see Mr. Oswald Fairhoe alone before I confront him with witnesses."

"And what am I to do in London?" I inquired, when I could once more gain his attention. "I was at least useful in Mr. Waine's school—perhaps worth my victuals and drink and the clothes I wore. Who is to be burdened with my support until I can find work to do and while I learn how to do it?" I already began to feel unwilling to incur fresh obligations on such uncertain grounds as those which would entitle me to claim recognition of the father who had left me to the care of strangers—of the mother who had found comfort in the thought that I was dead, though I could not blame her for that hope; I was so dispirited that I wished it had been well founded.

"You must be my guest first, then the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Letsom; then, I think, my aunt will claim

you for a week, while you make up your mind what you will do."

The truth is, that my late excitement, added to the strange events which had broken up my peaceful but fully occupied life, had produced in me that sense of unrest, that craving for complete change which so underlies quiet natures. It is the peculiar characteristic of Englishmen that these fancies always tend to a sort of inarticulate yearning for the sea; and though I knew nothing even of the appearance of the shore, except from books, and had never seen a ship, except in the docks at London, it took this course with me. Perhaps, in talking about my mother, and in thinking of her as lying amidst the wrack, and weed, and all the awful mysteries of the ocean's bed, my thoughts were verging seaward. Be this as it may, the longing was there.

But it was Mr. Ravel's turn to tell me all that I had waited so long to learn, and to introduce me beforehand to those who have already become more familiar to the readers of these pages than they were at that time to me.

How well I remembered those streets through which we drove in a cabriolet from Aldgate to the West End! At the entrance to that very court near Temple Bar I had stood one rainy night, waiting for Weevil to bring me the share of a slice of hot pudding from a cook's shop across the road; and now we got out there, and, after discharging the cab, Mr. Ravel let himself into one of the houses with a latch-key, and, bidding me follow him, led the way to a pair of handsomely fur-

nished rooms, where wine and potted meats, and all sorts of cold delicacies, were set for us on a table, half of which was covered with books, in gilded bindings.

We walked afterwards to Mr. Letsom's house in one of the large, dull, old squares, and the house was older, if not duller, than the square itself. A footman in black, with a worsted epaulet on one shoulder, opened the door to us; and a fine-looking, middle-aged lady, with a dark, ruddy complexion and great dark eyes, and jetty hair just streaked with silver, stood up trembling, and holding up her hands to me. Dr. Letsom was a sort of high-dried, loose-jointed, humourous gentleman, with short hair that looked as though it had just been lightly powdered, and a peering short-sighted way that accorded very well with this, and caused him somehow to resemble a well-disposed bird, though I could not at all decide what bird. I stayed there that night, and long after Mr. Ravel had taken his leave sat asking and answering questions. I learned to love and respect Mr. Letsom even on that short acquaintance, and we were the best of friends, so that before I went to bed I had almost determined to give my mind to physic. As I lay in the comfortable spare room looking on the dull old square, I could hear the roll and murmur of the street traffic, and of the carriages taking people home from assemblies where they had almost waited for daylight. When I fell asleep these sounds coming into my dreams sounded like the waves and the wind roaring far out at sea. Mr. Ravel was with us again directly after breakfast, and took me to another strange old

house, quite in the heart of the City, and near an old weedy overgrown churchyard, and a mouldy, but yet smoke-dried church. I knew that the trim, pretty, white-haired old lady who kept the house was Mr. Ravel's aunt; but I did not know, until she told me, that she was cousin to that Barbara Waine whom I had not yet learned to call by the name of mother. She was her second cousin, however, and therefore first cousin to my grandfather. Not that I could see why this was a good reason for her declaring that she had made a will in my favour, subject to my good behaviour. I thought at first that age had touched her with some peculiar wandering fancy which associated me with another face long lost to her; but there was nothing about that neat, orderly house, with its undefined odours of sweet herbs, nor about her spotless dress and white shrivelled hands, to favour such a suspicion. I learnt afterwards that it was true; and that, out of love for the memory of my mother, and regret that, because of her own want of caution, that secret marriage had come about, she had made me heir to that old house and a thousand pounds when I came of age.

It was this purpose which had led all these good people to bring me to London, that I might choose some profession, and so spend the time profitably until another letter should come from that outpost of the New World where my mother watched beside her dying father in an Australian farm. It may have been this and its undefined suggestion of thraldom when I was panting for wide breathing-room and liberty of

thought and action, which made me so dull and listless, and at last began to take the colour from my cheeks and the vigour from my walk.

There was one place to which I paid an early visit, and there I was comparatively at ease. Not that my good friends did not strive to make me happy, each in a separate way; and Mr. Ravel must have suffered sorely from the course of theatres and concerts which he undertook for my amusement; but I was restless, and it was only at Sergeant Richard Cobbold's that I had an occasional bout of good rousing exercise. For the worthy sergeant, who heard my history with wonder, and never could forgive himself for his share in it, had opened a "school of arms," and there taught fencing, singlestick, pistol-shooting, and other athletic exercises, not omitting the art of self-defence, under a noted professor, in whom I at once recognised that "Nobby One," in whose booth I had made my first public appearance, though I took care not to make him acquainted with that fact in my private history. It was not the "sports" which attracted me, however, though I excelled in some of them, thanks to my old training under Rory Lee; I loved to sit and talk to the sergeant and his friends—old non-commissioned officers, who would "drop in towards the afternoon," and smoke a pipe with him. Amongst them, singularly enough, was one who, the first time I saw him, I knew was a sea captain. The smell of the salt was in his clothes, the briny breezes seemed to fan his curling, iron-grey hair, as he sat smoking his pipe and cutting tobacco-stoppers out of firewood with his

knife. He was related to Cobbold on the mother's side, and evidently had a great admiration for the sergeant, who he declared (much to the scandal, but at the same time to the good-humoured forbearance, of the old soldier) had too much of the makings of a man about him, beggin' their pardons, even to have gone a sodjerin'.

Captain Prendergast always paid me a similar compliment; and, though he sneered at the art of fencing and thought but little of singlestick, would applaud heartily enough to see me come off successfully in a contest with the "Nobby One," and declared that all I wanted was a "sea v'y'ge" to set me up and make a man of me.

Is it any wonder that my unsuppressed longing should have returned, and that I should have secretly taken Captain Prendergast into my confidence? I seem to feel the same thrill go up my arm now that I am thinking of it as I felt on the night when he said, "There aint nothing to be done, then, but for you to come along o' me; for if onst the salt's got into your blood, nothing but salt water'll ever wash it out; but speak fair, my lad, and we'll see if we can't manage it." I don't think the captain had much to do with managing it, but Sergeant Richard Cobbold had.

He waited on Mr. Letsom; and the doctor, looking me over with that shortsighted medical eye of his, and running his long boney hand over my arms, and tapping me scientifically on the chest, told his wife, to her great concern, that it was the very best thing I could

do. Before the afternoon he had called on Mrs. Petifer; and the old lady, when I called to see her the next day, stood upright, leaning on her crutch-stick, her soft hand held out a little tremblingly, but a bright glint in her unflinching eye, which made me love her for her high womanly courage. "I know all about it, my dear," she said; "and I don't know but what Doctor Letsom's quite right; but you must send your captain to me, and we'll see how you are to go; not as a common sailor, that won't do for Oswald Fairhoe's son; no, nor for Silas Waine's grandson either, let me tell you."

"Whatever you do will be good and kind, and like yourself," I said, kissing her cheek, which was all finely crinkled and ruddy like a winter apple; "but why should I not go as a sailor? Must I always be a burden to somebody, and not work for myself? I will come back again safely and not disgrace the name I bear, never fear, though that name is neither Fairhoe nor Waine, but Valentine Day. To have you for a relation is distinction enough for any man."

It sounded like flattery, but I didn't mean it so. My heart was full to think that this dear, brave, pretty old woman loved me, and to know that the same blood ran in my veins as had kept her eye bright, her face unclouded for so many years.

I think tears stole from under her drooping lids as she sat down in her chair again; but she looked up, bright and earnest, to say,

"Heaven be with you, child! It is but an easy voyage I hear, to those West India Islands now-a-

days, and I shall live to see you come back hale and strong."

So, with this and more talk, the thing was settled, even in spite of Mr. Ravel, who gave way to the majority; and I was enrolled as a sort of supercargo under the captain on board the Betsy Jane, a large trading-ship, bound to Kingston, Jamaica.

By the time that the Betsy Jane swung and creaked in Kingston harbour I had "suffered a sea change." New blood seemed to be running in my veins, my heart felt lighter; and, as Captain Prendergast had prophesied, the voyage had made a man of me in more senses than one. I felt as though years had been added to my age since our ship was warped out of dock in London; and all the events that had preceded that day were removed someway to a great distance, and yet, on the other hand, seemed to have occurred but yesterday, so lightly had they been lifted from my heart. I had few duties on board the "good ship;" but after the first prostration, succeeded by the first excitement, I set myself to pick up what I might of the whole art of seamanship. The captain was a willing tutor; and the mate, Mr. Harty, albeit a little jealous of my unrated position on board, would now and then give me a lesson or two; while even a gruff old copper-coloured bo'sun, who had sailed about the world for fifty years under the name of Shadwell, because he was first picked up in a crazy wherry swinging on the muddy shore of a dock in that locality, growled out the results of his experience when I shared his watch during the still, sluggish nights when

we heaved through the wash of the leaden waves, and yet made no headway. There is no need to describe that voyage; for, like most voyages, it soon settled down to a dull monotony, broken only by alternations of bad weather or of glorious days, when we spread our canvas to the favouring winds, and felt how unbearable a sea life would be but for the sense of motion; how to lie "like a painted ship upon a painted ocean" is the worst form of dreariness that even a poet can imagine.

Ours was a decent crew, and there was much to be thankful for in that, for it makes all the world of difference at sea that the people who are around you every day should be amenable to ordinary good-fellowship. I was not always in the captain's cabin, though the men would touch their foreheads to me when I went forward or took a turn in the watch.

There was but one man on board amongst these rough, honest fellows to whom I felt the kind of repugnance which brings about this state of feeling. He was a quadroon, or perhaps a lesser relation to his negro ancestor, with a face of the colour of a bad imitation topaz, and slow eyes, with that opaque white which makes the black pupil so intense. I knew by instinct whenever his spare, small figure was near me as certainly as if his blue-brown, skinny hand had touched my shoulder. He was a fellow of some education, too, for I could hear him reading to the men sometimes from such stray books as had found their way into their sea-chests. Captain Prendergast knew little of him, except that he had relations somewhere

in Jamaica, whence he had come aboard on the Betsy Jane's last homeward voyage, when she was short-handed, and had shipped himself for the double journey in the name of Sancho Mark. I disliked him so heartily that I was quite prepared to hear some evil of him—was rather disappointed, in fact, to find that he was a steadyish fellow, except in his occasional gusts of overpowering rage, when he had been known to pluck at his jacket-sleeve and twitch out a knife; and I found myself almost unconsciously watching him—a compliment which I am bound to acknowledge he returned whenever we met, either about the after-deck or in the forecastle. It must have been from the gossip of the men that I learned that Sancho had made a little venture on his own account in a couple of cases of cutlery and ironmongery, stowed away, in a secure corner, with the rest of the cargo. I fancied the bluff fellows who had made the former voyage with him looked at him out of the corners of their eyes sometimes; but if the men of a crew don't try to tolerate each other there is no getting on comfortably; and so, perhaps, like the famous parrot, though they didn't speak, they thought the more.

I had more personal interest in the one passenger who occupied the best cabin—a stout, rosy, handsome gentleman, who, having been home on sick leave, was about to rejoin his regiment in Jamaica — Captain Harry Maylie, of the —th Light Infantry. He dined at the captain's table, where I met him occasionally; and, as he was as gay and frank as a boy, we had a

pleasant time of it, in those still afternoons when the two officers, sitting over their cold rum-and-water, dignified by the name of swizzle, would listen to his stories of life in the West Indies, and cap them with wonderful yarns about smugglers and pirates picked up from records of the time when the American mosquito fleet swooped down and beat up all the strange craft from about Cuba and the treacherous reefs and shallows that made traps and nests amongst the key islands.

It was during one of these confidential gossips, when the curls of smoke from the cheroots were just fanned by a light breeze, and I had dozed into a half sleep as I watched them break and float above our heads, that I was startled by hearing our passenger say, "Yes, there's many a worse place than this, I can assure you, though it's one of the oldest left in the colony. I'd sooner be staying with my friend Fairhoe than have to sleep in barracks, or, for the matter of that, in any house in Kingston, though it's only an hour's ride."

"Ah!" said the captain, "it's an old family amongst the planters out here, I've heard tell, is his'n; and, if I ain't mistaken, we've got some'ut for him in the hold —leastways consigned to his agent in town, Mr. Clark. Cases of cotton-prints, and sech like, for the hands, I take it; and may be a box or two for the ladies."

"Ah! there's only one lady now, captain—his daughter; and a beautiful creature she is, let me tell you. Poor Mrs. Fairhoe was the reigning toast at

Kingston in my time; but she died, sir, after I came away."

"Not out o' love o' you, I hope, sir," said Captain Prendergast, solemnly, but with a queer look in his eye.

Captain Maylie flushed a little. "You don't mean any offence, I am sure, captain," he replied, rather gravely. "I expressed myself awkwardly. There wasn't a gentleman round about that wouldn't have died for that lady, sir, and her husband knew it; and what's more, there wasn't a man better able to take care of her and of his own honour than Walter Fairhoe. I was a friend of the family."

"I humbly ask your pardon, Captain Maylie," said the old salt. "I was only a-joking; but I should ha' been more keerful; it warn't a pretty subject. So you knew the family, eh, sir? I did hear, before we started on our last homeward v'y'ge, that Mr. Fairhoe had some thoughts of going back to England to live—leastways not going back, becos he's native born to Jamaiky, as you may say; but there *was* a talk of his plantation a bein' in the market because of his havin' come into something better in the old country—heir to the estate, or what not."

"I never heard of it; and, as to being heir to the estate, why, I think I should have heard of it, if my old schoolmate had been dead. Mr. Oswald Fairhoe's head of the family in England; and, to show what strange lives we soldiers, as well as you sailors, lead, Captain Prendergast, I've never seen my old schoolfellow—that is, Mr. Oswald Fairhoe—for nearly a score of years."

"Not since you were both boys—eh, sir?"

"Ah! you're a bad hand at compliments, captain. We were a little more than boys; and I'm a bad hand at a story, or else I might make one out of my last sight of my old chum. I was at his wedding, sir, and he did't see me—his first wedding, poor fellow!" added Captain Maylie, sighing into his tumbler. "The poor lady's dead since, I hear. There was some mystery in it all that kept me away from Fairhoe; for I think she left him and went abroad, and there died. I never learned the particulars."

"Not though you were at the wedding?"

"Well, I was there; but not as a guest. I was in town at the time, and had been looking up some of our recruiting officers somewhere about the Tower, when I lost my way in trying to get back to the West-End. There was nobody to ask; for I'd wandered into some dull old hole of a City street, where everything was as quiet as the grave; and there, sure enough, was a churchyard as dusty and uneven as a street in Kingston, but a good deal cooler. The church door was open, and I thought I might find the sexton or somebody inside to put me right. It was such a still, dim place that I couldn't see much at first; but I'd no sooner got into the middle of the aisle than I heard the parson's voice reading the marriage service; and there, before the altar, stood my old acquaintance Oswald and one of the loveliest girls I ever set eyes on, both of them dressed in quite a plain fashion, and without any bridemaids. 'Hollo! my friend,' I said to myself, 'if this isn't a runaway

match, I'm mistaken;' and while I was considering whether I ought to interfere or not, I heard the lady say 'I will,' and had only just time to bundle into a high pew before the parson shut the book, and the whole thing was over."

"The breeze is a-gettin' up, sir; and I think as we might trim sail a bit, and p'rhaps send up the flyin' jib," said Bo'sun Shadwell, coming into the cabin.

This broke up our sitting.

Port Royal was all ablaze in the killing beams of the sun that flamed like a burnished copper pot in the shimmering blue haze which lifted or vanished as we rounded the point where the officer of health came on board. Every bit of exposed ironwork on the deck of the Betsy Jane was too hot to be touched; the low lagune which that long grilling bank of sand called the Palisades has formed into Kingston Harbour lay like a lake of molten lead under the pitiless sky, and we were all gasping in the scanty shadows of such canvas screens and awnings as could be most readily rigged, when the word was given to let go the anchor, and the negro boatmen hailed us as they bobbed up and down in their light skiffs.

The town of Kingston has been depicted so often by those who know it well, that there is no need to describe afresh; its narrow, hot, sandy streets, that turn into choked rivulets of mud in an hour's rain, such as falls in the West India islands; its lower town, with the counting-houses of the agents, the daily bustle of such business as is left to its merchants and brokers, and the conflicts of negro boatmen, touters,

and hotel helps; the upper town, with its decaying, shabby houses, once bright with gaudy paint, and looking like cardboard edifices, with their broad jalousies and green and white piazzas amidst the vines and cocoanuts and palm-trees of the gardens, but now dingy, neglected tenements, wherein few Europeans live. No need to speak of the dull streets and duller hotels, of the ugly public buildings and uglier churches; of the sights, and sounds, and smells, the rain and mud, the sun and scorching sand, the cabins and the grog-shops, though it was in one of the latter that I first found myself on going ashore the day after we had taken our place in tier in the harbour.

CHAPTER X.

FETISH AND TREACHERY.

Captain Maylie had departed in one of the boats that came alongside at Port Royal, rowed by four negroes in white canvas suits—for the journey from the port to the town is made by water, unless the traveller is mad, in which case he may occasionally ride along the Palisade, with imminent danger of sunstroke. Sancho Marks, as I afterwards learnt, had begged hard to go also, and had contrived somehow to take his two cases of ironmongery with him, as they were for use on a small plantation and "pen," as the country houses just out of Jamaica are called, just rented by a Mr. Beaujean, a French gentleman new to the island.

"I wish you'd go ashore, my lad, and 'call on Mr. Clark," said Captain Prendergast to me the next morning; "his office isn't a stone's-throw from where you'll land, and I must stay aboard here with Mr. Harty till we see about discharging cargo. I've got these here cases of his'n, and I understand that they're for Mr. Fairhoe, up at Spring Hill; just you ask him whether he'll see 'em landed himself, or how it's to be. He's a good friend o' mine is Clark, and he's sure to

ask you to stay dinner. There's old Shadwell and Ben Rogers, they've been here half a dozen times, and won't want above half a day ashore, so they shall come and look arter you with a boat, afore nightfall, and then you can sleep in my cabin, unless you alter your mind and stop at Kingston, at a hot-el; but my advice is, sleep aboard till you can find better quarters."

So it was arranged that I should go ashore; and, after having dressed in a new white suit of duck and linen, and with a blue loose jacket over my arm, I hailed a wherry and went ashore, calling to Shadwell and Ben not to be late, but to send word to me to Mr. Clark's when they were ready to go back to the ship.

It happened that the first person of whom I inquired when I set foot upon the quay was Mr. Clark himself, who, hearing of the arrival of the Betsy Jane, was just going on board. When he heard my errand, however, he asked me to go back with him, and, turning up a steep, narrow street, led me to a dim but large and cool counting-house, where a couple of clerks sat at a shaded window, writing away with pens the scratching of which echoed in the bare room.

"It's rather unfortunate," said Mr. Clark, after a negro had brought in a case-bottle of rum and an earthen jar of water. "You'll have just a drink, Mr. ——, I really haven't the pleasure of knowing your name. It's rather unfortunate, sir, that our agent in London shouldn't have got my letter earlier. I don't know what to do with those cases. The fact is, Mr. Fairhoe's just negotiating the sale of his place, and has already made arrangements for going to Eng-

land. I think I must ask Captain Prendergast to let 'em stay on board for the present. I've been expecting Mr. Fairhoe himself all the morning, and he may come yet. I'll tell you what," he added, after thinking a little, "you could do me a great favour, if you'd like just to have a look at the country. Can you ride or drive?"

I said I could do either, and should like nothing better.

"Then if you'd take my horse and go over to Spring Hill, it's a place worth looking at if you've never been here before, as I can see you haven't, and you might be back to-morrow before dark, even if they make you stay to dinner, which they're sure to do. I'll send word back to your ship. Just tell Mr. Fairhoe how the case stands; I ought to say, how the cases stand, oughtn't I, eh? and then, perhaps, he'll give you instructions. Stay, though, I'll write to him. I lunch in an hour, and if you'd do me the favour of joining me I'll have the horse saddled. Would you like one of my people to take you for a stroll in Kingston, or will you amuse yourself with a cheroot?"

I said I would take a stroll by myself, and be back in an hour or so; and, after shaking hands with me as heartily as if I had known him for twenty years, he called to the negro to go and get "Kepi" saddled, and then sat down to write his letter.

There was no walking very far, and, after stumbling and wading across the uneven stones and through the burning sand of half a dozen streets, I felt myself growing giddy, blinded by the glare from the roadway

and the pelting rays of the sun here scarcely tempered by the morning sea-breeze. It was in a narrow by-lane that I halted, almost staggering, under a sheltered porch, and, before I could stop myself, fell down a couple of steps against a door in the dark entry. The door itself opening, I lay half my length on the dirty floor of a good-sized room, furnished, as I could see when I came to myself a little, with two or three tables and some bamboo chairs. A draught of tepid air seemed to come from a window at the other end. It was a mere opening in the wall, entirely blinded by a sort of wooden jalousy, composed of broad laths nailed to each side, and sloping one below another so that they would admit the air, which seemed to come from some shaded space—perhaps another street—without allowing the sun's rays to pierce into the room. Towards this spot I dragged a chair, and when I had regained the power of using my eyes, saw a negro woman, dressed only in a sort of striped bedgown, busy at a little deal counter, where she was filling some water-jars and arranging a few coarse plates and dishes on a shelf already occupied with sundry glass bottles and tumblers. She must have been deaf; for though I knocked upon the table she appeared not to heed me, so I got up and walked to the counter.

"Can I have something to drink here?" I said, almost in her ear.

"Goramity! who dat?" she exclaimed, turning round with her great eyes all white, and her thick, red lips agape. "Oh! beg you 'scuse me, sar; we not look for customer dis time ob day; an' buckra

gentleum no come dis way to see ole deaf Sarah, not in usual, sar; you want long bitter, sar; or else leetle glass ob swizzle wid fresh lime. Oh yah, ah. Dis nigger 'freshment in usual, sar; but you bery much welcome, an' I gib you glass out ob my own bottle, sar."

So saying, she produced a flat flask from some hidden nook, and mixed me about half a pint of "swizzle;" a tablespoonful of which so far restored my faculties that I carried the rest back to the table, determined to finish it coolly. Loquacious as she was, she had enough delicacy to suppose that I wished to be quiet—at all events, she went on with her business and left me undisturbed in the dim shadow of the corner of the window. Perhaps I had fallen asleep; or was it a freak of my imagination which caused me to hear a voice close to my ear, saying, "Mr. Beaujean is the same as Sancho Mark, and Sancho Mark is the same as Pietro Sanchez, and the two cases are at the cottage by this time ready for work to-night, Monsieur Alexandre."

The words were spoken in a foreign accent, and before I had stirred a foot I knew that I was awake, and that two people were talking close to the blinded window.

The reply was in the thick utterance of a negro, and was so barbarous that I could scarcely understand it.

"And he will be dere dis bery night in dat ole cabin, dat is what you say, massa, eh sar? Massa Pietro he not be dere, dat what you say?"

"I don't know that, Monsieur Alexandre; if Mon-

sieur Fairhoe is not at home, Sanchez has another affair,—other business, do you see. There is a lady—you know that."

"I know dat. Yah, ah! oh! Alexander—dat me, sar; and look you, sar, Alexander Prince, dat my name. My fader was Prince—I Prince, if I stay, and my fader not sell for two, tree, five long gun, six blanket. My fader had file tooths, massa, an' yet he come brought for slave. Dirty ole nigger, sar, not free pusson ob colour.' Me be Prince again one ob dese day, sar, when dis dam massa out ob de way and Pietro take de gal; but if Pietro die, I take her mysuff, sar. You see dat? You not come to de cabin to-night, sar?"

"Yes, I shall be there, with Sancho. I have to see to it, too, M. Alexandre."

"What for, sar? Why you take all dis trouble? You not get no land, no cane-piece, no cabin, no yams, no let off workee, no gal, noting—eh?"

I could not hear the answer; but there was a sudden change in the negro's voice.

"Ah! ah! oh!" he said, in a deep tone. "Me, too. Dat it, sar. I get 'lotment, an' nobody lib to turn me off; dat one ting. I no workee no more; dat two ting. But den dere is tree ting. I see now dat I Prince. But you musn't be dere to-night, sar."

"Why not?"

"You come in an' get a drink, sar, and I tell you."

Here I heard the speakers walk away, and presently the door by which I had entered opened, and they

came into the room. It was too dark to see the black features of the negro, but I noticed that he was a tall, powerful fellow, dressed in loose shirt and drawers, and wearing a torn straw hat; his companion was clad in a gingham suit of a greenish colour, was a short square built man with low closely-cut hair, beard, and moustache, and a low French face; just such a face as I had become familiar with about Leicester Square in the old time, when I was for a few weeks a London street-boy, and swept Weevil's crossing at the Haymarket.

I had risen, and was already standing at the counter settling my score as they came in. Either they had not noticed the window as they stood outside, or I had been sitting in a position which gave it some acoustic property. They eyed me for a moment as I went out, and then, calling for drink, seated themselves at another table.

When I got back to Mr. Clark's office, his negro servant was leading a fine chestnut horse up and down a shady courtyard opposite. Seeing me, he tethered the animal to a ring in the wall, and ran across the street.

"Massa bery sorry, sar; but he 'bliged to go out drecklum; you please go in to lunch, sar, and dere find Massa Brown tell you which way to go, less you like Jonah, dat me, go in de trap wiv you, sar."

I said I should prefer to ride the chestnut, and went into the cool office, where an ample lunch, both solid and liquid, was spread. A note from Mr. Clark begged me to accept his apologies for a sudden business

emergency, and said that one of the clerks would give me a map of the road, which was easy enough to find. A letter to Mr. Fairhoe lay beside my plate upon the table.

I was soon mounted on the chestnut, scattering the hot dust from his hoofs as he spluttered up the narrow streets, and growing cooler as I left the town behind and made for the more open country towards the mountains, whose tops were touched by a gauzy veil of clouds.

For the first four or five miles of the way I was brooding over the meaning of the conversation I had overheard in the grog-shop, and wondering whether there was any villany afloat with which Sancho Mark had to do; but whatever it meant it could be no business of mine, and my spirits rose with the exercise and the air which became clearer as I went on.

The country that opened about me was lovely; water sparkled in the distance; the sky was clear, though light clouds floated overhead, and even the heat seemed bearable where everything around revelled in life and beauty.

Even the wild bush, the mere jungle, was picturesque; but here and there it was broken by orchards or gardens of exquisite loveliness, full of tropical plants and graceful trees, their foliage dyed with a hundred hues, and bearing flowers and fruit. These were, as I afterwards learnt, the property of negro squatters, who paid no rent. I thought of my old friends, the gipsies, as I looked at the yams, the plantains, the bread-fruit, the giant pears, and all that wealth of vegetable life; but

at that time I knew neither the tenure by which the land was held nor the names of its productions. I was bent on reaching Spring Hill; and, though I saw nobody of whom to inquire but one or two black women, who clacked unintelligible answers, I found my way pretty well, pulling up at last on the edge of a thick wood, beyond which I could see a cluster of huts, a great patch of what I guessed to be sugarcane, and divided from this by a hedge which seemed to me to be hawthorn, a vast garden-orchard, where fruits and flowers glowed in a thousand gorgeous dyes and scented shrubs loaded the air with spicy odours. Never had I witnessed anything so beautiful, and I waited for a moment that I might take in the whole aspect of the scene, alighting to cut a stick from the hedge that hemmed in the enormous bouquet with a dark green setting. The wood was harder than I expected, but my knife had a saw in it, and I contrived to obtain a respectable knotty cudgel—a trifle too heavy, perhaps; but I put it under my arm, and made for the house, the low roof of which I could see already stretching in a long frontage a little beyond the road, which there turned off to a mere bridle-path. I was surprised to see no labourers in the fields, though a few women moved about amidst the cottages, structures of wood, and clay, and thatch; but as I approached the large house by a long row of outbuildings which seemed to extend from each side in a sort of double ring at the back, a knot of men stood beside the path. They were evidently field negroes, barefooted and dressed in blue cotton frocks and loose drawers;

but they seemed sullen, and as I passed they only stared at me with big rolling eyes, until I asked if that was where Mr. Fairhoe lived.

"Yes, massa live there," said one of them; "but 'taint no use for you to go, sar; he not at home, an' there ain't nobody to see you, sar; only nigger, sar; you come wait at ole Sambo's cottage, an' he tak your oss an' rub him down, sar, fore you go back agin.' He sprang forward, and would have seized the rein, but the horse gave a sudden swerve and sent the stones in the road flying.

"No, thank you," I shouted, as I went on; "I'll wait up yonder."

The fellow fell back, and I could see them staring after me as I rode up to the door along the broad space in front, where a greyheaded old black came out in answer to my call; for the door was open, and several negroes and brown men and women of different shades were lounging about the entrance. The upper windows were covered with Venetian blinds, and beneath these (for it was only a one-storied building, principally of wood) a broad piazza supported by tree trunks of shining timber ran the whole length of the house. Beneath this, a vast hall was entered by a small lobby; a great room, which might be used as ordinary living-room, while smaller apartments opened right and left.

A clatter of voices greeted my arrival, and I thought that the old man, whose face was like that which one sees carved on the top of a walking-stick, looked uneasy.

"Massa not 'tome, sar; but old Pepe, dat me, sar,

gib your oss to Bill, sar, to take to stable; you want rest."

"I came to see Mr. Fairhoe; when will he be home, or who is master of the house when he's away? Has he no white servants here—no English servants, I mean?"

"Oh, yes, sar, me Englishman, coorse; and den dere Laidy, sar, she maid to Miss Beatriss, sar, and not so very black, good deal white. Den dere Juba, sar; he most confidenshal, sar; bery old servant to massa Juba been; go to England with massa ten, twenty years ago."

"Where is he?"

A dozen voices called for Juba, and at the moment that I saw a negro in a sort of livery come scuttling along the passage I heard another clearer and more melodious voice calling from one of the windows above the piazza, where a corner of one of the blinds was drawn aside, revealing a face that sent a sudden thrill through my veins. It was but a glimpse, but in that face I seemed to realise all that I had ever read of beauty or dreamed of loveliness. A bell rang sharply in the lower hall, and Juba disappeared.

"Missee say you please go up, sar; and if you take something? Perhaps you like wash, sar, while I get cold broil duck or wing of chicken, sar?"

The negroes looked a little surprised.

"Massa Sanchez not gone yet, eh?" said one slender brown girl, with flashing eyes. "Why doesn't he go?"

"I donnow; dam Massa Sanchez," said Juba. "You

come dis way, sar, wi' me," he added, addressing me, "an refress yourself; den you go up to see Miss Beetriss."

I followed him into a room where there was hot and cold water, as well as big basins and towels. "Don't go away, Mr. Juba," I said; "I shall want you to show me up-stairs; and will you please to come up if Miss Fairhoe rings while I am here? Don't let anybody else come, I may want to speak to you."

"Bery good, sar," said Juba, with pride in his port and pleasure in his eye. "Dem niggers ain't no use to speak to, sar—not been to England, sar. Dis way, if you please. Your name, sar; oh! yah! ah! I know, sar; you tell me jus' now. Massa Wollumtine Day!" he said aloud, as he drew aside a heavy silk curtain and ushered me into a large room, where I saw the same beautiful face lighted by the greenish haze that came reflected from the window.

That room elegantly furnished, filled with the scent of flowers, dim, but yet somehow full of a subdued light, seemed to go round with me as I bent in answer to the salutations of its young mistress; the long, dark silky hair; the pale pearly skin; the large, liquid luminous eyes; the slight, fragile, but yet beautifully moulded figure; the white tapering hand—I saw all these, not with a suddenly awakened passion, but as the realisation of some far-off vision. You are mine, I thought, as I recovered and took the chair to which she pointed; you are mine and you cannot help it. I am your relation, beautiful being, and some of the same blood is in us both. You cannot alter it if you would,

and you do not know it. I am strong and you are weak, and if it is necessary I can die in protecting you, and you cannot alter that either; and I think I could die now if you would only say "I would not alter it if I might," for I shall always love you because you are mine as much as because you are yourself. Was I intoxicated with that enchanted air through which I had come?

I had not till that moment seen another face upon which the greenish light of the window fell and turned it to a waxy yellow; the body belonging to it came forward, however, and as I rose in answer to its bow I thought I stood before Sancho Mark, so like was that topaz-coloured face to his. But there was more in that wily eye—more in those thin, writhing lips—more in the overhanging brow than in the face of Sancho; moreover, the man before me was a West Indian dandy —wore earrings, had encased his little feet in shiny boots, had gems glittering on his lean, brown fingers; and was scented with perfume.

"This is Mr. Pietro Sanchez, papa's overseer," said the lady, in a voice that had in its musical ring a slightly foreign accent, I thought.

I bowed lower than before, and Mr. Sanchez returned my salutation with such interest that I fancied he wished to show me the accurate parting of his well-oiled curls.

"May I ask what is the business that brings you to Spring Hill? Mdlle. Beatrice never transacts business," said the quadroon, in a low, spiteful voice, as he brought himself again to the perpendicular and

waved his skinny, be-jewelled hand towards the lady.

I should have mistrusted the man anywhere; but there was something in his look which almost added hatred to my dislike as he turned to seek some confirmation of his words from Miss Fairhoe. She stood by the window, to which she had ordered Juba to bring a wicker chair; and, perhaps in obedience to some sign from his young mistress, the negro remained at the other end of the room, where he was engaged in adjusting some piece of mechanism which set a large fan in motion and stirred a cooler air at an opposite window darkened by deep louvre shutters.

I could not understand that look of Mr. Sanchez. It was both insolent and fawning, threatening and conciliatory; but mingled with these expressions was one of coarse, gloating admiration as his opaque eye rested on the beautiful figure of the girl. Had he known how near he was to being thrust out of window, crashing through venetian blind and over the low parapet of the verandah, perhaps he might have slipped a knife out of his sleeve, just as Sancho Mark had done on board the Betsy Jane until our cook, who was a full black, and had a dislike to "yaller men," sent it spinning overboard out of his hand by a well-directed crack on the elbow with a rolling-pin. I seemed to think of all this, and of the likeness between Pietro Sanchez and Sancho Mark, as I stood looking at the former gentleman. What had come over me I know not; but I should have liked to pitch the overseer out of the window.

I could see, by the green glimmer that came under the blind near where she stood, that Miss Fairhoe's face wore a proud and angry expression; but at the same time there came a wild, frightened look into her eyes which made them like those of a startled fawn. I almost thought that they turned appealingly to me, as she said, "Mr. Fairhoe will be home this evening, and if this gentleman has very important business, he may like to stay to see him. Juba shall bring you some luncheon here, it is cooler than the dining-room; and so, if you gentlemen will pardon me, I will rejoin you when you have talked over your business; but I hope you will stay to see papa," she added, a little emphatically, as she bowed to me and passed towards a heavy silk curtain which hung across a doorway in the panelling of the room.

Sanchez sprang after her while her hand was yet upon the curtain; and, without thinking what I did, I was on my feet in a moment. Beatrice looked round as the overseer checked himself in the intention of laying his hand upon her arm.

"You will not give me an answer, then," he said, almost in a whisper, so low that but for the deep silence and my own keen hearing it would not have reached me. "You will not have my help before it is too late? Remember, I can do nothing after to-night; and if your father——"

"Your master!" she said, in a tone so loud and stern that its influence seemed to work a change in her own face—to change its softness into stony beauty, its timid shrinking into a proud, defiant scorn. "You

had better come again when Mr. Fairhoe has returned, and tell him all that you have said to me."

He stood before her, his head bent, his dull eyes gleaming with a red fire, his breath coming thick and fast, his fingers clutched; then he turned and, with a chuckling laugh, tried to disguise the fiendish passion that writhed his face.

"As you will, Mademoiselle," he muttered, with a low bow; "I leave you to think of what I have said until I come again; for then (and here he almost menaced her with his outstretched hand) you'll have no time to make up your mind, and it will perhaps be more than I can do to help you or *my master* either."

He spoke with an accent that gave his words a more sinister meaning than belonged to them, and, turning swiftly round, stooped to pick up his broad panama hat, which had fallen on the floor near where he had been seated. He had either forgotten my presence or had not counted on my being so near him, for as he turned he came against me. I could not resist the temptation of the moment, and even before he stumbled put out my foot so quickly that he tripped and went sprawling on the carpet. I saw the look of alarm, the quick warning gesture of Beatrice Fairhoe. I saw, too, that beneath his linen jacket he wore a red silk sash, in which the handle of some weapon was only half concealed. It might have been that there was only wonder and perplexity in my face when he leaped up and confronted me. I know that I made no movement, and met his evil glance without any change of countenance.

"I suppose I must ask your pardon," he said, with an ugly sneer; "but I thought that gentlemen remained seated when they came from a long ride."

I could not speak till I had mastered myself, and could see that he was surprised that I took no notice of his taunt.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to state your business before you go," he said, with another sneer. "I cannot give myself the pleasure of staying to lunch with you, and Mr. Fairhoe will not be home till it is too late for you to travel back safely alone. Ah, here comes Juba with the tray! You needn't wait, Juba; come back again presently, and see that this gentleman's horse is rubbed down and ready to start in good time, or he may be late for dinner." There was an uneasy and yet a mocking smile upon his face, and I felt that I did not know how to cope with him. Only one thing was clear to me—that I would not budge until I had seen Miss Fairhoe again.

"You must be hungry after your ride," he continued, looking at me curiously; "allow me to wait on you while you tell me what has brought you here. Mr. Fairhoe will be sorry not to have done the honours of his house to a visitor; but in his absence"——here he shrugged his shoulders and left the sentence unfinished.

I was awkward enough, for my experiences had never introduced me to such a man as this; but I had recovered myself sufficiently to return his bow and to wait, pointing to a chair until he had seated himself

on the opposite side of the small table which Juba had wheeled towards the window. It contained an ample lunch and a whole collection of bottles. He poured out a great glass of some thick liqueur, from a little gilded flask in a silver filigree stand, and slowly swallowed it, eyeing me all the time.

"Do you, then, receive Mr. Fairhoe's guests when he is away?" I said, huskily.

He nodded.

"You are master of the house in his absence?"

He shrugged.

I was thinking what I had best say next, for that there was mischief brewing I knew, and I felt certain, somehow, that he was the chief brewer. It was necessary to be cautious, and yet my head was in a whirl, the room seemed to be moving slowly round and round, and the thoughts of all that I had overheard in the morning chased each other through my brain. This confusion, and the sight of his smooth yellow face opposite, led me, I suppose, to make a mistake which was like throwing a lighted match into a powder-barrel.

"And your name is Pietro—Pietro—Mark?"

He fairly bounded out of the chair, with an oath so shrill and venomous that I heard it above the clatter of the glass and china which he overturned in his sudden paroxysm. He had become livid.

"Who told you that lie?" he whispered, stepping back, and, as I could see, tugging at something under his jacket.

"I beg your pardon!" I replied, as Juba came in,

alarmed at the crash of the fallen table, and stared open-mouthed and open-eyed. I was thinking of quite another person, of an acquaintance of mine on board the ship in which I have just come from England. Your Spanish or West Indian names confuse me, I fear; but——"

"Don't apologise, pray!" he answered, panting; "but you made a bad mistake, sir. Sanchez—Sanchez—is my name; and I have reason to hate the name you just mentioned. You will see how much when only to hear it from a stranger, brings into my hand—this!"

He held out a strange weapon as he spoke, and his eyes glinted evilly. It was a knife with a serpentine blade. I have seen plenty of them since—they are called "creeses"—and are no doubt made by the dozen in Birmingham for the Malay market.

Juba gave out a guttural sound; and, though he was on his hands and knees on the floor, picking up the plates, kept his big round eyes, which were all whites, fixed on the shining steel as though it had some fascination in it.

I was never a hero; I doubt whether I am even courageous; but I owed it to my strange training that I never was frightened when anybody only "showed fight." To parody the words which were never uttered (so Sergeant Cobbold told me) by the Duke of Wellington, whenever there was danger of attack from a personal foe my first thought was "Up, *guard*, and at them!" In this instance, however, there was no need for such a course; for the overseer had seen my look

of astonishment and hastened to cover his inadvertent passion.

"It's curious, isn't it?" he said, handing me the implement, but with his other hand still under his jacket. It was a very pretty toy indeed, all inlaid with silver and pearl in the handle. "I have rather a taste in such things," he continued, bringing out an ivory-mounted pistol from the other side; "but—you'll excuse me—I am also particular with fire-arms; I never trust them out of my own hands. But here has Juba set the table to rights again; and now to business, if you please."

"My business is with Mr. Fairhoe. I have a letter to deliver to him, and I should prefer waiting. Don't let me keep you, pray. I can remain here all night, if necessary; and I will do so."

"You had better give me the letter; and—a word in your ear—Mr. Fairhoe won't be back to-night; perhaps not to-morrow. How then?

He brought his head so close to mine that I edged away a little as I felt his hot breath on my cheek. His eyes had grown bloodshot, and he preserved his cautious manner with obvious effort.

"Well, then," I answered, "I will wait for Miss Fairhoe, and leave my message with her, or send it by a messenger."

"You are quite determined not to go?"

"Quite, unless the master of the house should come or his daughter should request me to leave her. No offence to you, Mr. ——. Pardon me, I won't trust myself to mention your name again; but you won't

persuade me to leave the house an hour before I choose."

"Then stay, or go to the devil—which you like," he hissed, tilting his broad hat on to his head. And he wriggled under the blind, swung himself over the balcony, and was gone.

I sat there staring at the window through which he had disappeared, wondering what would be my best course, and endeavouring to fix my thoughts upon some plan by which I might warn the household of the impending danger without creating unnecessary alarm. Juba had several times called my attention to the lunch that stood upon the table, and had moved about the room uneasily, as though he expected me to speak. At last he came and stood opposite me, leaning against the wall, with his eyes wider open than ever, and his face expressing the utmost surprise and consternation.

"Dere ain't no good 'bout Massa Sanchez when he go away so suddent," he said, when he at last caught my eye; "dere's something in de wind, I'm feared, 'long of Missee; and dis nigger know dat oberseer great dam scoundrel by what yaller Adelaide say. All de folks here know dat; and what dis child wish is dat Massa Walter come home 'fore night. Dere's someting wrong on de plantation."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"How I know, tink you say? Why, old Jim, he go 'long to stable to rub down your oss; dere he see two ob de hands dat jus come in from ober yander—boys out of de cane-piece, an' dey say dere no work

to-day becos' some great meetin' held to-night; an' the Obeah man come 'long byme-by from long way beyant toder side ob de mountain. What you tink dat, sar; dat look bad, eh?"

I could see that the faithful Juba was too much flustered to make his advice worth taking; and, after all, I remembered that Miss Fairhoe herself was more likely to meet the danger calmly, and would understand its nature better, than anyone there. I had seen that she could summon courage when it was needed, and she alone could tell where the danger lay.

There, however, was the difficulty. Would she make known to a stranger the cause of her resentment against the overseer, and the menace implied in his manner when he sought to detain her? What was the answer for which he waited? what the request that he had made? It must have been one which, to judge from her looks, had been as offensive as it was threatening; and could only have been made in her father's absence. Then, her half-appealing look towards me, her anxiety that I should outstay Sanchez; if I had interpreted that glance aright, she would return and speak to me—perhaps ask my help; and she should have it—yes; at the utmost risk to my life, and though I had to fight my way back to Kingston. Would it not be the best plan, after all, for her to go back with me before sundown, and either meet her father on his way home, or seek him at his agent's house?

I know not into what day-dream I had fallen, when I was startled by the rustling of the curtain, and she

came in, followed by the girl who had been in the hall on my arrival, and who seemed to be her waiting-maid. I could see that she glanced uneasily around, as though she feared to find some other person present; then she came towards the table, and noticing that the food and wine were untouched, asked me why I had not eaten something.

"Mr. Sanchez would not stay to lunch," I replied; "and I waited to learn in what way I could serve you. What was the meaning of his threat? He has included me in it now, and so I have some right to ask."

She coloured crimson, and with a low cry, bent her face down upon her rounded arms as they rested on the back of a chair.

"I cannot tell you, for I do not know," she said presently, throwing back the long tresses of shining hair which fell disordered over her forehead; "but I need help. Why does not papa come back? I am so helpless here, and yet I dared not tell him of that man's intrusion, when I did not know its meaning, or he would have been too sure to resent it, and so have brought some vengeance on himself."

"You are not altogether helpless while I am here," I said, as gently as I could; "whatever one can do who, though a stranger to you, is at least a faithful friend, I will try to carry out, though it should be with my life. There is no time to lose if all I fear be true; let the urgency of the case be my excuse for asking your confidence. Something I think I know already, and I can at least stay till Mr. Fairhoe returns. This letter is from Mr. Clark; and I have messages, also,

from Captain Prendergast, and from a still older friend, who was my fellow-passenger to Kingston, Captain Maylie. I wish I had disabled that scoundrel now," I added to myself.

She looked up at me with the same curiously-appealing look which I had noticed before, a look at once surprised and inquiring, as though something in my own face had caused her to regard me with enforced attention.

"Did you say that you were related to—to papa?" she said, quite calmly. "I never heard your name before; but then we know none of our relations in England."

Here was a question! My blood seemed to tingle in my veins and surge through my ears. I could find no answer readily, but at last I said, "I wish I could claim the right of a relation to serve and protect you; no tie of kindred would add to my zeal in that respect, believe me."

"I do believe you," she replied, quite solemnly; "and, if my idle fancies have been wandering, it is right that I should tell you what led them astray." She went to the chimney-piece as she spoke, and took down a small picture from the wall. It was the portrait of a young man, dressed in a white suit, not altogether unlike the one I wore, though of an older fashion; and in the stern, bold face that seemed to look at me with open eyes I could discern features that bore a strange resemblance to my own feebler lineaments.

"This is my great-grandfather, Richard Fairhoe,"

she said, as she held it before me. "It is the earliest recollection of my life; for I used to look at it when I was quite a little child, and wonder why papa was so unlike him, before I heard that grandmamma was dark and black-eyed. They said I was more like her than papa even."

"She must have been very beautiful," I muttered; and then, seeing that she started and coloured, I mumbled some apology, the only good effect of which was that it turned the conversation to the subject which would admit of no delay.

And yet it was delayed; for, though, when she had replaced the picture, she came back with a manner more demure and distant, the recital upon which she entered was broken with much disjointed talk, with many protestations, and with that indefinable strangeness which, perhaps, came upon us both whenever we thought of each other and of ourselves. Looking back to that time now, I fancy that the danger which we both were anxious to avert was swallowed up in a sense of another sweeter danger, arising from the sudden communion of two undisciplined hearts just awakening to a possible secret of their own, which attracted and yet repelled them with a tender fear.

Her mother had died seven years before, but not until her gentle teaching had brought happier influences to the child than those which she had dreaded from the life that surrounded them. In the gay society and thoughtless amusements of the time when she had married Walter Fairhoe she had taken a part for which she had no great inclination; and though

when this little daughter was born to them she became almost an invalid, she scarcely regretted the change that rather enabled than compelled her to devote her time to quieter pursuits and to the fulfilment of the precious charge with which she believed she had been intrusted. Her husband—gay, sparkling, and with those graceful accomplishments which seem to be gifts rather than attainments—never ceased to love her when she could no longer add her own charm to the society of which he was still the leading spirit; and when on his return from England, where he had been on a visit, he found her fading daily, and marked the change that that short time had wrought, he became her constant companion, brought his gay temper and strong vitality to cheer her, and even bent his proud and passionate temper to her sweeter and better will. He had been first saddened and subdued by the death of his father—a stern, vindictive, but cold and cynical man—who had succumbed to a long illness, brought on through a fall from his horse, which had started at the firing of a gun, and it was feared that some harsh measures towards his negroes had led to the shot, which he suspected was aimed at himself. So far from his relaxing his hard and sullen temper, however, he devised new modes of oppression against the "hands;" and though at his death only a few of the emancipated negroes remained on his estate, he could never forget the worst traditions of the old slaveholders, and left to his son not only an impoverished inheritance, but a legacy of hate and suspicion, in which, however, those who knew "the young

master" well had no part. It was he who, after a quarrel with his former overlooker, had appointed Pietro Sanchez to the place, in spite of his son's strong disapprobation—disapprobation which was silenced by a reference to some former service of the quadroon of which the younger man had no previous knowledge. From that time Walter Fairhoe had taken little interest in the business, and, though after his father's death he had set himself to reform and to improve, he lacked the dogged patience, and perhaps the active benevolence, to make many alterations in an estate which, year by year he talked of leaving, that he might take his wife and daughter to England. The death of Mrs. Fairhoe—not suddenly, but by slow fading away, so gently as to leave her husband hopeful to the last—disarranged all these plans, and kept him, after the first deep sorrow had been mitigated, in a state of indecision—strange, indeed, to a man of his energetic character. This want of purpose was increased by letters from England, which delayed his claiming possession of some property there to which he was entitled; and he continued from year to year holding his position only on the uncertain tenure of a probable speedy departure. He had no liking for the superintendence which could alone make a planter's business successful, even on the old estates; and, though he kept up an establishment, and still mingled in the best society at Kingston, he left the working of the land more and more to Sanchez and his "book-keepers," as the assistant overseers were called, and was satisfied with a superficial authority, which, while it gave him a sense

of power, left him neither pleasure nor profit in an occupation that had become detestable to him.

It was not from Beatrice that I learned all those particulars, although her short and often interrupted narrative seemed so to involve them all, that I cannot now separate it from those details with which I became acquainted afterwards. That which distinctly belonged to her was the burst of childlike sorrow, when she dwelt upon her mother's love—the affectionate admiration that shone in her glowing face, as she told me of her father, and turned towards me the little locket where his dark, penetrating eyes seemed to look at me from a little ivory miniature that had once been her mother's. When she began to speak of the overseer she faltered a little. He never was their guest, she said, although I might have thought so from seeing him there that day. Her father had said that the overseer must have made as much money out of the estate as he had, and had never really trusted him—though he went on month by month, carelessly leaving things to take their own course. Perhaps it was because he suspected him, that Mr. Fairhoe never asked the quadroon to his table, or it might be personal dislike. Whatever may have been the cause, Pietro Sanchez never came to the house except on business; he had a place of his own at the other end of the estate, and she had heard her father say that it was furnished in a style that only a Spanish quadroon or an African prince, newly civilised, could have invented.

Why did she linger so long on these details? Why

falter and pause when I asked her what had brought Sanchez there that day? Her face blushed burning red; her slender fingers beat restlessly upon the table, and, only after recovering herself by a strong effort, and with her hands pressed upon her eyes, could she tell me that the man had first insinuated, then avowed, his admiration for her in terms which left her speechless with fear and indignation. I think it needed few words to convey this information to me, or to rouse my own resentment, when I heard the sentences which she left unfinished, but which were yet so eloquent in their trustful pleading for help and sympathy. She had not dared to tell her father, or there would have been some violence done, of which she dreaded the consequences, and never till that day had the slinking villain spoken so plainly as to make his meaning more than doubtful when his words could be repeated.

We had both risen from the table, and now stood together at the window. What a tumult of painful thoughts, and yet with an underlying pleasure in every one of them, seemed to bewilder me and to defer the necessity for immediate action which her words awakened! For a moment I was tempted to return that sweet confidence by relating my own history; but I dared not claim the relationship which was capable of only doubtful proof. No; I would at least let that rest till I could speak of it without faltering, and be sure that I need not blush to own it. I cannot now remember, I could not even half-an-hour afterwards recall, the words that passed between us; but I woke suddenly to the fact that I was lingering there when

every moment increased the peril to which she and her father were exposed; that I held her hand in mine, and that, through a mist of tears, those bright, appealing eyes shone upon me in the deepening dimness of that silent room.

In less than half an hour I was riding swiftly away from a stable, at some distance from the house, to which I had been led by one of the negro servants. I had saddled the chestnut myself, and, after a few confused directions as to the path by which I might more speedily reach the main road to Kingston, was urging him forward, my head bent down upon my breast, my heart filled with such strange emotions that not even the urgent task that I had undertaken had power to control or lessen them.

Vague as the threats of Sanchez seemed, they derived new meaning from being associated with the conversation that I had overheard in the grog-shop that morning, and I determined, as the only course that seemed open to me, to make the best of my way back, that I might find Mr. Fairhoe, or meet him on the road. After a few inquiries of Juba, who seemed to be as stupid as he was faithful, but whose suspicions of some mutiny amongst the hands upon the estate had been aroused by the two lads who had come in that afternoon with news of an unusual excitement at the negro huts, I advised that the lower doors should be kept closed, and that the whole household should remain quiet, refusing to admit anyone until my return, unless Mr. Fairhoe himself should arrive before me. I say that I advised; but Beatrice took the com-

mand. She seemed suddenly to rise to the occasion with a courage which, as it shone in her face, made her strangely like that portrait of her father, and had its full effect, in its gentle imperiousness, upon the dozen servants who assembled in the hall to listen to her orders. Of these Juba at once constituted himself the leader; but I noticed that, of all that surprised and half-frightened garrison, Adelaide, Miss Fairhoe's own maid, was the most alert and determined. It was she who saw to the fastenings of the doors and windows, most of which were insecure enough; and, when I had collected what few arms were in the house, I noticed that she slipped something into her pocket that looked like a small, silver-hilted dagger, and had been brought from the cabinet in the room above.

"What is that for?" I whispered in her ear as she looked up and caught my eye.

"For Pietro Sanchez!" she returned, as a sudden flash seemed to quiver on her face, and her white teeth came together like a pair of castanets. "He will find what he comes for, and I have owed it him long enough. If this is too short to reach his false heart, he shall have this;" and she held a tiny pistol, a mere toy, in her hand. There was such hatred and revenge in her face, and even in her voice, though she scarcely spoke above a whisper, that I was afraid to trust her with the weapons, and held out my hand to take the pistol from her, but she held it behind her and glided back towards the door. "No, no," she cried, with a mirthless laugh, "I know how to use both. Ask any of these people here if Adelaide isn't the best shot in the house with a

pistol. I will take care of Miss Beatrice—that's my business, sir, that is. These people can take care of the house. Miss Beatrice and me we go and sit up-stairs."

"Dat quite true, sar. Oh! Miss Adelaide she dreffful clebber wid pistol. Her fader Massa Walter's great shooter when he go out after de birds. No doubt ob dat, sar. She keep all de long gun clean when she bery little gal—'fore she knew dat dam Massa Sanchez, sar. He make lub to Adelaide, sar. She got one score to settle wid him, you see." This was what Juba whispered in my ear as she darted out of the room; and I could see some verification in his words from the eyes and faces of the other negroes, male and female, as they stared after her, shaking their heads solemnly, as though they knew more than they dared say, even to the waiting-maid herself.

There was no time to make further preparations, and, with one word at parting which was far less in its meaning than the look that answered it, I touched Miss Fairhoe's hand and went out at a small side door to the stables.

Half an hour had passed, and I had not yet struck the bridle-path that would take me to the road by which I had come. I rode briskly, too; for the gorgeous brilliance of that fiery day seemed about to fade—no, not to fade, but to be extinguished. Quite suddenly the sun had appeared to fall like a spent ball, all red-hot and glowing in the sky, and a pecliar motion stirred the air, as though the light trembled at some coming change to darkness. Almost before I had ceased to wonder at this, it *was* dark; light enough for

me to see my way, but yet suddenly dim, without any intervening twilight. Far away above the mountain slopes, seeming to rest upon the topmost crags, a few dun, feathery clouds had settled, and as I checked my horse to look around me, in some dismay lest I should have missed my way, they grew into a great mass constantly increased by other and lighter vapours that were driven before a wind of which I could yet feel no breath upon my face.

There was some reason for anxiety, for I began to fear that I had really taken the wrong road; the path itself had narrowed instead of widening, and far beyond, I could see that the broken country changed suddenly to a dense wood where the last gleams of light still lingered on the broad shining leaves of the tropical trees. I had almost determined to turn back, until I reflected that in any case I could not be far from the place I sought, and that the road might skirt the wood itself, for I had passed much such a forest patch on my journey in the morning. Still I was greatly disconcerted, for with the disappearance of the day there came a great stillness; the notes of strange birds to which I had before given little attention ceased in a moment, or died away in wailing but melodious murmurs, while new sounds arose to herald the night, amidst which the hoarse crake of a multitude of frogs came from a distance with a hollow monotony inexpressibly dreary and dispiriting.

I pressed on with a new fancy upon me that the road grew longer as I went; so lonely did I feel amidst the unchanging murmurs of that great expanse, and

under the influence of the swift shadow that fell upon the earth and gave an uncertain shape to every distant object, that I almost lost the sense of time and space. My watch, too, had stopped, and a sudden dread came over me that I might have spent half the night travelling many miles, and yet have been unconscious of it. I remembered the same strange misgiving in connection with losing myself in a snowstorm on a bare down in England, and this brought a hundred vagrant recollections which pursued each other through my brain as though I rode along during some uneasy dream. The awful silence, or those unknown sounds so much worse than silence, numbed me almost past rousing, and I shouted in order to assure myself that there was something real and human about me; but the shout sounded muffled, and came back to me, unable to penetrate the heavy air, and the darkness so closed me in that I could scarcely see half a dozen yards before the horse's head. No wonder, either; for I had ridden into a kind of zigzag amidst the trees, where a wall of leaves rose up at my bridle-hand, and the path was lost amidst a tangled underwood through which I could see no way.

I was about to turn and make some effort to retrace my steps, when, above the hum and croak and nameless rustling and wheezing that filled the air, I heard a cry still more startling and unearthly, although it was the sudden wail, or rather howl, of human voices. It seemed to stop all other sounds for a moment, and was succeeded by a noise of many guttural voices talking clamorously.

What should I do? To make any inquiries would perhaps defeat the very object which was now weighing so heavily on my heart; and yet, even those forbidding sounds, in which I could not distinguish either merriment or mourning, gave me fresh energy, and helped to lift the horror that had begun to settle on my spirits. There would surely be a chance of the people, whoever they were, proving friendly enough to direct me if I rewarded them; it was unlikely that any of the negroes at that distance would have known of my visit to Spring Hill, and I would at least make the effort if I could only discover whence the voices came. To that end I dismounted, tied my horse carefully to the nearest tree that had a branch low enough for the purpose, and, with the cudgel which I had cut in the morning in my hand (I had my old fancy for preserving carefully any cudgel that I had cut and shaped for myself), stepped cautiously over the twigs and weeds, peering and listening as I went.

Again, a low wail increasing to a wild shout and dying away as it had begun, but evidently only a few yards off, where a light flamed for an instant making a red bar as it shone and vanished. It had only lasted a few seconds, but I could see that it was occasioned by the opening of a door in a low hut, and that the sound was some sort of greeting, for, before the light was screened again, a shadow had sprung across it and was swallowed up, as it were, in a flood of fire, so strong was the ruddy glare. A party of negroes joining in some uncouth festival, no doubt. I crept nearer and saw the same light glowing through the chinks

and crannies of the building—a mere barn or large-sized hovel of timber or wattle and rough plaster, with no window, except a square opening now closed with rude boards, and with the smoke of a wood fire (scented wood, for I smelt it before I came near) rising through a hole in the thatched roof.

It was not till I had felt my way almost round the place that I discovered the window by a ray of light that darted through a knot-hole in one of the rough planks. Standing well under the overhanging thatch, which threw a deep shadow all around, I peeped through, and almost doubted whether I had not become the victim to some strange delusion.

Over a fire built up with earth and stones in the middle of the hut, which was totally bare of all furniture, except what seemed to be a heap of clothes in one corner, swung a three-legged pot, or cauldron, dangling from iron rods driven into the ground; and around it, squatting on the floor and almost destitute of clothing, were about twenty negroes—men and women—their faces distorted, their eyes wide and staring, and their white lips working as though each one had been suddenly stricken by a frenzy or was possessed by some devil of their own summoning. There was nothing in the appearance of the iron pot that was particularly strange to me, and I had seen ferocious faces in my time—some of them swarthy enough, too—but the hideous contractions that warped and distorted those black visages seemed to be such a strange compound of brutal passion and abject terror that it was unlike any human expression I had ever seen. Except

for this dreadful quiver of every feature, and the moving of the jaws wherein the teeth of some of them gleamed in the firelight, they might have been so many grotesque pagan images of bronze, so motionless were their dark bodies crouching on the ground, so fixed the soulless glare of their white eyeballs. As I looked, the same wail rose on the air, and they all rose, joining hands, and, circling round the cauldron, sung a song in some barbarous tongue. Not one of them spoke; but a tall, muscular negro suddenly sprang forward from the ring, and, dipping his hand into the reeking pot, smeared some of its contents upon his breast, whereupon they all sat down again, crouching as immovably as before. He was the last comer, and, I suppose, everyone present had gone through a similar ceremony; for, immediately afterwards, I heard a heavy bar or beam drawn across the door near which I stood, and while I was wondering what this meeting mean', and what hell-broth was brewing, the pile of clothes in the corner stirred, and a figure like a black-leaded skeleton leaped at a bound into the middle of the room, and stood there with both hands stretched out before him, as though he had been stricken into mere lifeless bone again. His hair, less woolly and more abundant than that of his companions—who were not all of the same shade of blackness, he himself being of that dull and yet shining hue which gave him such a strange appearance—began to stir in snaky movements on his head, his eyes rolled heavily, and his body and limbs, thin almost to attenuation, seemed to quiver, as though some inner machinery operated upon them, as he began

to chant a low crooning song, in which I heard the word "Obeah," and at once knew that I was witnessing some mystic rite of which I had heard only a few allusions amongst the yarns of the men on board the Betsy Jane. At intervals the song or chant was taken up by the rest in a sort of chorus, and at such times he thrust his hand into a skin pouch which hung about his neck, and, taking therefrom a handful of something, which I was too far off to see, dropped it in the cauldron. At each repetition of this performance the incantation grew louder, and the features of those present worked even more horribly. The contents of the pouch were perhaps wild herbs and roots; but they must have been believed to possess strange virtues, for as they were added to the seething mess, the negroes, some of them grey with age, writhed in contortions, grovelled on the ground, or beat their woolly heads with their open hands. At last he snatched from the bag what I believed to be a live snake, a toad, and some other living things, and dropped them, one by one, into the pot, the chant rising to a yell, and the whole company leaping to their feet with frantic gestures, as he dipped his hands into the steaming liquor and smeared himself from head to foot. Then the chant changed; each one came forward, and was anointed on the head and breast, while some put out their tongues and had them touched by the smoking fingers of the obeah man. Almost before the last candidate had retired the whole party broke into wild and awful cries in some unknown gibberish, and leaped and danced, and wrought themselves to such a frenzy

that I shook with horror, and wondered if they could indeed be human, and not transformed into something devilish. The lurid light of the fire, now fast dying out, shone red upon them; and, as they tore and writhed about it, fresh fuel was added to keep up the glare.

Suddenly, and, as it seemed, in the midst of their most furious paroxysm, the obeah man raised his fleshless arms, and called out in a high piercing voice, that could be heard above all the din. In a moment every panting, quivering, writhing form was crouching or grovelling on the ground again, their faces buried in their hands, their foreheads in the dirt. A low trembling moan was heard from some of them, as their leader covered his head with a cloth and squatted in their midst. What were they expecting, and how long would they have to wait for the promised revelation? The stillness startled me, and I felt that all my hopes of saving Beatrice and her father would slip away if I could not find the road. With my heart beating tumultuously, and my head on fire, I sprang to the door, and beat upon it with my heavy stick. There was a sudden gasp, a stifled groaning inside, and, before I could retreat or even think what to say, the bar was thrown down and the door itself swung open.

I heard a piercing, unearthly shriek—the shriek of a woman, and yet in something so unlike a woman's voice that I involuntarily held out my hand as though to ward off some unexpected danger. A grey and withered negress—how old no tongue could tell—stood

cringing in the firelight, and pointing to me with a look of horror that paralysed her skinny hand, almost white in its bloodlessness.

"I say so," she cackled, in a trembling voice. "I tell you so; an' yet you no listen to ole Deb. Oh! oh!—oo! oo!"—she whimpered, rolling on the ground. "Ole Deb soon die now she see a sperrit. Oh! oh! ole Massa Richard, your Duppy no hurt poor ole Deb! You go lay quiet in you grabe, massa; ole Deb nebber not hurt you," and she rolled upon the ground in a paroxysm of terror, screaming, "Ole Massa Richard! Ole Massa Richard come again! Dat Richard Fairhoe's ghost, come in at the door to answer Obeah for hisself!"

She fell forward as she spoke, and some of the negroes dragged her away from the fire, and cowered, glaring at me with speechless fear. The greater number, however, sprang to their feet; and the obeah man himself, darting to the corner where the clothes were, snatched them away, and discovered a small opening, through which he disappeared. Another minute, and the cauldron was overset, the fire trampled on the floor; but through that same opening a man came in with a lighted torch in his hand, and made towards the door. I knew him instantly; I almost knew the motion of his arm as I saw a long knife gleaming in his hand, its blade directed towards me. He knew me, too, for he was almost upon me before I had time to cry out "Sancho Mark!" But action was quicker than speech for once, and, with a backward step, I rang my hardwood cudgel on his elbow with

such effect that the knife went spinning in the air; and, with a curse of rage and pain, he flung the burning torch from him and plunged into the thicket.

CHAPTER XI.

ALL FOR LOVE.

A RED tongue of flame darted up from the thatched roof and lighted up a space as far as to the edge of the wood, then the roof itself burst into a fierce blaze. The torch had fallen amidst the dry grass and reeds, and a shower of fiery sparks leaped up and fell crackling upon the naked, huddling crowd within. Snatching such clothes as were nearest, and dragging the women after them, the negroes burst out at the doorway with a yell of rage and terror. Fortunately, I was so far within the circle lighted by the flames that the deep shadow of the eaves still fell upon me, and I remained unnoticed; but a fresh yell from within told me that there was still somebody beneath the blazing roof, part of which had fallen in and added to the heat and smoke of the overturned cauldron, and the trampled embers that had been scattered on the ground.

"Sacr-r-re!" said a high, angry voice. "They have gone, the poltroons, the cowards, and gone without taking the arms with them, and we must be roasted alive if we do not follow; now with me, Alexandre, with me, to cut down this clay wall."

I heard a crash as the mud and plaster gave way to

the blows of some heavy implement; and presently a figure, dressed in a loose blouse of European fashion, came round from the back of the hut, and stood for a moment looking at the blaze. He must have been in some smaller room, entered only by the hole in the wall through which the obeah man had retreated, and he evidently waited for some companion, for he took off his broad hat and fanned himself as he called, impatiently, "Alexandre, you must take me into the road, and we will go back to Kingston, my friend. where in the devil's name is Sancho, and what should have sent those fools mad with fear? Their obeah man says they saw the apparition of a dead Fairhoe; but I can only say I should like to see the real living Fairhoe of to-day at this moment. Blue death! But one of us should sleep in the wood, and not wake again."

A tall, muscular black figure, with only a hat and trousers covering his huge limbs, came bursting through.

"Hush, Massa!" he said. "You dam deal too much fond talkee dat way 'bout Duppy; and obeah man he hear you; den we bofe get in trouble, if he make fetish before I make fetish too. When de nigger see Duppy what you call papparishun, we know dat dere aint no use, 'cept to be quiet; we bery perlite to Duppy, oh, yah ah! and if dis ole Massa Fairhoe come back, den 'taint no use till we see obeah man for tell us what to do."

"Bah! Come away, then. Or you go first and I'll follow you; and see that you go the nearest way. If

the sentinel that was to wait for Walter Fairhoe is half such a frightened dog as you, there will be no chance for Sanchez to-night."

The negro turned, and I thought he raised his hand menacingly; but the light only just flickered on the pair, and before I could be certain, he had wheeled round and gone off at a run, followed by his companion, who panted curses as he adjured him not to go so fast.

Should I follow them? I had already taken a few uncertain steps in the same direction when the thick roof of the hut fell crashing in, and amidst a whirling eddy of smoke and a sudden glare of hot embers there emerged a black skeleton figure, dragging a heavy chest from the ruins with one hand, and with the other shading his eyes from the falling sparks. It was the obeah man; and, as I stood looking at him with wonder, not unmixed with dread, he saw me. Whether he, too, believed that I was something supernatural I cannot tell, but he loosed his hold of the box, and, with a shout that sounded like the howl of a wild beast, fled along the path by which I had come.

It was my last chance of finding my way out of that maze of leaf and timber, for the night had fallen dark, and the very air seemed heavy with a threatening gloom. Before his cry had ceased to echo in the woods I sped after him, following less by the glimpse that I now and then caught of his black limbs than by the sound of rustling leaves and crackling branches. I had no time to notice which way he led; for as I crashed, and plunged, and stumbled on, guided, now

that we had entered the thicker shrubbery, by the hoarse gasps and murmurs that he gave as he tore through, I could not gain upon him, for his naked body passed where the twining creepers caught my clothes. I had almost given up the chase, when I fell, breathless and torn with the thorns through which I had scrambled, over a great log of timber that lay across a path, opening, as I fancied, on a clearer space beyond. He had bounded over the obstacle, and was already emerging on what appeared to be a wide clearing, but beyond this all was dark. He seemed to have vanished, as though a great dim curtain had dropped suddenly between us, and even the sound of his footsteps ceased in an instant.

It had been swallowed up in another sound—an awful rumbling and seething that filled the air. I sprang to my feet again as the dim curtain drew nearer and nearer, steadily, and yet with a strange vibrating motion. It came on swiftly, and almost before I could cringe under the shelter of that fallen log I was driven backward by it, and fell as it were in the very centre of a mighty tempest. It was a curtain of water—of rain, that fell in one steady sheet, hissing as it dashed in fierce torrents on the parched and thirsty ground, bearing down stones and even trees in its tremendous course, and making the path in which I crouched a running stream. Every surrounding object was obliterated; and, as though both sight and hearing were to be absorbed in some awful upheaving of nature, peal after peal of thunder broke in sharp, sudden explosions, as if a cannonade had opened close by on some

height above the watery veil, which was twisted and rent in places where great ragged patches of cloud appeared to open and disclose fiery chasms in the blackened sky.

The whole terrible convulsion subsided as rapidly as it had appeared, and the hissing murmur swept away before a great gust of wind that added to the uproar and mingled with it the splintering crash of uptorn trees and riven branches. Then the great blue canopy above cleared suddenly, the masses of heavy cloud raced away beyond my sight, the stars rushed out, and the great peaceful moon sailed tranquilly in the heavens amidst a snow-white fleet. Before me lay an open space indeed, for it was the high road; and almost before I reached it I recognised a spot at which I had paused in my morning's journey. What should I do? I was weary, half blinded, and drenched with the deluge of rain; but there was nothing for it but to push on as best I might to Kingston—unless, indeed, Mr. Fairhoe had already passed homeward without foul play. I was standing to wring the water from my jacket, wondering, in a half-dazed way, what had become of Mr. Clark's chestnut; but I have never yet been able to satisfy myself whether my reflections preceded, or were suggested by, the whinny of a horse at some distance. It is certain that I heard the whinny, however, and borne along with it, on the light clear air, the voices of men talking. Was I in one of those strange conditions of which I had read, when people, half in this world and half in some dream state of existence, hear familiar speech and see familiar faces

when the persons to whom both belong are dead or miles away? No; I was faint and giddy, but the voices came nearer and nearer yet, until I could make out the very words.

"Capt'n 'll be in a rare fanteeg, Ben, won't he, a waitin' watchin' for us to come alongside; but then, what does that argyfy? Why, as it 'ud never do for us to go without this young shaver, as I hope aint come to no harm."

"Well, you see, what Capt'n says is, don't you come away without him, he says—not unless he's along of Mr. Clark; and when we only see that nigger a sweepin' of the countin'-house, an' he says as the young chap's out a top of a horse, why, what was we to do but to foller. The very fact of his atrustin' hisself to a creetur like this here, aint what I call seamanlike, an' when we foller up this road an' get caught in a hurrykind an' overhaul the wery animal, as has foundered with him, what's *your* view on it, Shadwell? My own is as he's waterlogged somewheres here away. Lord, how wet I am!"

"Well, that aint much odds, I 'spose, eh, Ben?"

"No, not with saltwater; but this here kind o' thing's different; it's like three quarter grog, this is—no excitement in it, you see. But let's overhaul this here leather consarn again; jest bear a hand to hold on to the creetur; here, take a hitch round this here stump of a tree, while I gets the water out o' my eyes; pison me if I aint all scuppers!"

Another whinny; and there, as I stepped into the middle of the road, were Bos'n Shadwell and Ben

veering round and round at the end of the reins in the vain endeavour to bring the chestnut to bearings. Their delight and astonishment knew no bounds as I called to them, and for some minutes after I had taken the horse in hand, we all three stood grinning at each other in mutual satisfaction as they told me how, after the tempest, they had seen the horse come plunging into the path, with the torn branch of a tree hanging to his bridle, and how he had stood shivering and snorting until they cleverly effected his capture by both advancing upon him at an angle from the other side of the road.

There was no time for grinning, however, when I had told them as much of my story as I thought necessary. We held a council of war to determine what was the best thing to be done. Both my companions were brave enough, and insisted that they would go forward to Spring Hill to help the garrison there; but they were unarmed; and I was far from sure that they might not be shot or stabbed on the way before they could reach the house. When I say they were unarmed, I mean that their only weapons were the knives that each of them had slung round his waist; but Shadwell, who had been the most persistent, improvised a formidable engine of warfare by producing half a dozen iron bullets from the recesses of his pockets and firmly knotting a couple of them into his neckerchief, which he had taken off for the purpose.

"That ain't *my* way, Shad," said Ben, to whom the bos'n had handed a couple more of the same sort.

"Slung shot's best in a stockin'—more handy like, an' a better grip."

"Hush!" I said, holding up my hand, as I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs in the distance: "keep her under the shadow of the trees, and Heaven send that this may be Mr. Fairhoe himself!"

I climbed into the saddle, which I had covered by turning my jacket inside out, and had scarcely drawn up in the footpath, when the canter of the hoofs sounded nearer, then the regular pat-a-pat was succeeded by a confused scrambling, as though the horse had been checked suddenly; and, above this was heard a shout, followed by the sharp report of a gun.

A horseman standing in his stirrups and laying heavily about him with a whip amongst a cluster of negroes who pressed upon him, and one of whom, in spite of the sounding blows that fell upon his head and shoulders, clung to the bridle, dragging the horse's head almost to the ground, while another, with both hands twisted in the rider's dress, sought to pull him from his seat. I had scarcely taken in this scene and begun to press forward to the rescue when from the hedge, above which a film of blue smoke yet lingered, a gigantic African scrambled out, brandishing a clubbed musket in both hands, and followed by a companion armed with what looked like a sabre as it flashed in the moonlight only a few paces off. My first impulse was to ride this man down, and I went straight at him as hard and as fast as I could urge the chestnut even by a bang with the cudgel that I still held in my hand. Luckily for me, that cudgel was of Jamaica hard-wood,

for the fellow sprang aside as I reached him, and, though he received a blow upon his skull that might have cracked a millstone, he only shook his head and leaped at me, whirling his sabre till it looked like a circle of light. It must have shorn off my arm but for the sudden wheeling of my horse, as I tugged at the rein and warded the blow with my stick; but, as I have already said, the wood was tough, and, with a whirr that tingled me from wrist to shoulder, the blade snapped short off and left the hilt only in his hand, while my recovering blow crashed full across his face and laid him in the road. His companion had turned, and now stood in mid-passage waiting for me, towering up almost as high as I myself sat in the saddle, and with his weapon lifted above his head to deliver one crashing blow. Whether the group who were attacking the man in front had heard my shout and so loosed their hold for a moment I couldn't tell, but the horseman himself had shaken them off, and, after a plunge or two which scattered them right and left, was thundering along, with a pistol in each hand.

He was close beside me almost before I saw the flash, but the figure in the road flung away the musket, raised its huge hands high above its head, and spun round and round till it fell with a crash amidst the shrubs that lined the pathway.

The rest of the attacking party had run forward to help their comrade, and were now waiting at some distance behind me as though with the intention of intercepting the passage of my companion; by some means they had gained possession of knives and stakes,

and had already spread themselves out so that they came fanwise, the last of them running to the shelter of the hedge.

"The scoundrels! that is how they waylaid me at first," said my companion; "and see that fellow skulking away there has a gun too; let me go first, and I'll fetch him out of that with the other barrel, it won't do to waste a shot." He levelled his pistol as he spoke, but there was no need to fire; rapid footsteps sounded on the road, and before the negro had gained the shelter he sought, the gun he carried exploded harmlessly in the air as Shadwell caught him with all the strength that his muscular arm could use, and struck him senseless with that terrible slung shot.

"Hooray! Come on, Benny!" shouted the sailor, as he brought down another of the terrified negroes; and, not to be behindhand, Ben charged upon the other side, amidst a volley of yells, above which—crack! crack!—thud! thud!—went the whale bullets, impelled with all the impetus communicated by the sling of a long cotton stocking.

He must have been down amongst them if we had not ridden in upon them; and for the next minute there was a clash and clatter and the sound of firearms as Mr. Fairhoe emptied a couple more barrels. Then the negroes gave way and made for the bush, howling and screaming as they went, and we were left alone.

It *was* Mr. Fairhoe. He had answered that question, though I had no need to ask it; for even had I not seen the miniature, there was something in his face, as the moonlight shone upon it (for he had lost his hat)

that was strangely like the look with which Beatrice had regarded Pietro Sanchez.

"You are Mr. Valentine Day?" he said, as he held out his hand after the field was won. "Mr. Clark said that I might find you at Spring Hill. I can only wish for both our sakes that he had been right; but I trust you will go back with me, or let me go back with you. The enemy must look to their own dead and wounded. But where are our friends' horses? I understood you came on alone."

"I will go back with you, Mr. Fairhoe," I said; "and there is no time to spare; no time even for me to tell you why. These two good fellows came on to look for me, and I cannot leave them; so we must walk their pace; and, indeed, I fancy Mr. Clark's horse hasn't much go left in him. Pray don't waste a moment, these devils may be back again, and more with them, in less than an hour, and then it will be too late."

"So, that's Clark's chestnut, eh?" he returned, coolly. "So it is, by Jupiter! Then I'll tell you what, Mr. Day, we'll try what he's made of, and ride home double. What will our friends say to that? They can hold on, I suppose."

"You don't mean for to say that you expects me an' Ben here to get a top of a horse?" said Shadwell, scratching his head. "Awast, there; I tried it onst at Greenwich, and pison me if I ever trusts myself on sech a yawin' craft again, as reg'lar strained my timbers and rubbed all the sheathin' off o' me."

"Pooh! you won't trust yourself, you'll trust me;

and Ben there will trust Mr. Day. Come, up with you, if you don't want us to go back to Kingston with you, for if I leave you to fight these niggers by yourselves, I'm——. Well, never mind what I am. Get up behind; there's a cloak rolled up to keep you off the saddle."

"Oh! what, you means for us to sit astarn while you steers ahead? There aint no seamanship in that. But, Lord, we can hold on by some o' your loose gear, your honour," said Ben. "Now then, bos'n, I'll jest give you a hitch up, and then you can haul away at me when you're safe on deck."

"All right behind there?" said Mr. Fairhoe, as Shadwell settled himself, the horse growing restive at the unusual burden.

"Ay, ay, sir," said the bos'n, clutching that gentleman's coat-skirts, and hauling Ben up into his place on the chestnut, which nearly upset us both by lashing out suddenly with his hoofs. "I aint got no family myself, sir; and Ben here's left his wife in a chandler's shop, so as she won't mind bein' a widder."

"Then, will you take one of these pistols, Mr. Day, in case of accidents? I've loaded them afresh in both barrels."

It was in this way that we rode slowly back to Spring Hill, and during the journey I told my companion of all that had occurred there. There was something infectious in his coolness and in the vigorous life within him that seemed to control all mere nervous weakness; for I found myself recounting every incident in regular order, from the conversation that

I had overheard in the morning to the scene in the wood. Fortunately, I had been used to hardships, and weather hurt me but little, or I must have given way under the faintness that came upon me as we neared the house, and could hear a murmur of voices, a confused sound of cries, and saw lights flitting hither and thither along the space in front of the verandah that stretched its entire length.

"I have been a dolt, or I must have seen something of what you have told me," he said. "I have been a careless master, and my father was a cruel and an unscrupulous one, or he never would have fallen into the hands of that piratical thief, Sanchez. But to think that the skulking dog should have dared——. He could have known me even less than I knew him, surely," he continued, as though he spoke to himself. "This is no time to thank you," he added, grasping my hand; "but if, as I suspect, I should owe you more than my life, I will thank you more worthily if I ever have the power."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," said Shadwell, shading his eyes, and peering towards the house; "but I shouldn't go no furder on these here animals. There's a reg'lar crew of them bloodthirsty niggers a dancin' an' squirmin' about over yonder, and they'll make no more to-do than be down upon us, if onst they gits the chance. What do you say, Ben?"

"Well, I've been a turnin' of it over," replied Ben, with slow sagacity, "and it's my notion as we'd better not try to get in that there way, for, if so be as there's any o' them varmints inside, how can we perwent them

a pepperin' us out o' that there poop deck, whilst we aint got a chance; but if we was to go astarn and so onst get inside, the old un's in it but what we'd see the reason why we wouldn't."

"You're right, old mate," retorted the bos'n; "and skiver *me* if I think there *is* any on 'em in yet. Why there's a yaller fellow there as is a sort o' captain a pintin' here an' there, and——Ah! you sneakin' vagabone, you nearly had it, did yer?"

A pistol had been fired from one of the windows, and the man of whom Shadwell spoke only just escaped; as it was, the shot seemed to glance quite close to him, and he rapidly retreated towards a hedge, where I could see some torches moving about. Indeed, there seemed to be a sort of picket there, for, on looking still more steadily, I made out that two or three horses were kept under the shadow of the tall shrubs.

"Follow me! No; stay. Why should I involve you all in this personal danger? Let me go alone," said Mr. Fairhoe, slipping off his horse and leading him into a little plantation close by as Shadwell dropped down and shook himself together after his jolting. "I can have no such claim as this even on brave men."

"I have a claim to stand by you then," I replied, "and I will do it. Your daughter gave it me, and I will not relinquish it except she bids me." I don't know what could have induced me to utter such a rhodomontade, but I saw him look at me with a keen, inquiring expression. Fortunately, Ben turned off the remark by saying, "Well, your honour, I didn't think, arter we'd come all this ere way, at the risk of not

having no comfort in settin' at our meals all the home'ard v'y'ge, I did *not* think as you'd be so damned ungrateful as to throw us over. Hows'ever——Why, I say, Shadwell, if we aint forgot that there case-bottle. Here, jest you overhaul your pockets, for my tongue's like a dog-fish arter that."

It may seem a trivial incident that we should all have hailed the production of a small bottle of rum; but it was one which was of no small importance just then. Mr. Fairhoe twisted a leaf into a cup, and, scooping some water from a rain-pool amongst the grass, mixed his liquor and handed it to me. The sailors took a dram neat, and we all crept swiftly towards the house, with a tacit understanding that no more words were necessary.

We made a detour, keeping well in the shadow of the trees and shrubs; then, following a narrow path that led along a row of sheds and outhouses through a sort of kitchen garden, ran softly in the direction of a low, sheltered door, communicating with the servants' offices, and opening directly into a big kitchen.

"Hist!" whispered Mr. Fairhoe, as we stood in the shadow of the porch; "there's a light here, and all seems quiet." And he knocked gently at the door, still standing in the shade. It was opened instantly by a negro, who put out his head, and said in a low voice, "How many ob you is dere, dat you come so quiet? I hear a screechin' jes' now, so you better be quick. Is Massa Sanchez comin' dis way, cos he better make haste too?"

We could see the fellow's white eyeballs glaring

round as he caught sight of us at last; but before he could give an alarm Mr. Fairhoe had him by the throat in a grip of steel and forced him back into the house. He was one of the odd men about the garden, and had evidently turned traitor. With a pistol at his head he might have been made to give some evidence, and Mr. Fairhoe was about to put him to that test when we heard a confused shouting which sounded at the front of the house, and a dozen shots were fired amidst the curses and ejaculations of men and the screams of women in the room above.

I had heard a cry, however, above and beyond all that uproar—a piercing exclamation of a woman's voice, and it sounded not inside but outside the walls, for I had scarcely entered the door and could distinguish between them.

"Don't waste a moment for the love of Heaven!" I cried to Mr. Fairhoe. "Gag or shoot this scoundrel, and up with you to the verandah—that's where the fight is. Shadwell, barricade this door after me, and look for me in front; I shall come in that way if I return at all."

I broke away from Ben, who tried to stop me, and, again urging them to go at once, dashed across the garden to the other side of the house, for I had heard that cry again, and it seemed to come from the end of the building.

There was no way round except by forcing through a thicket of flowering plants, but I struggled on, beating down the boughs with my arms. Luckily, it was only for a short distance, but it seemed the longer from

the fact of the side of the house being totally dark. I emerged from it, however, to see that beneath the long balcony moved a crowd of negroes, half-naked, savage, and evidently maddened with the drink that was even then being handed about in tin cups as it was dipped from a keg. Torches flared from hand to hand, and threw a red gleam on all kinds of weapons; yells rose on the air, and the greater number of those assembled there hastened to one spot at a little distance where somebody seemed to be in command. As the light flashed upon him I thought I could recognise the negro who called himself Alexandre, and pressed forward from the corner where I stood behind a buttress of timber supporting the end of the verandah that I might get a better sight of him. At that moment the group around him divided, and a white man came straight toward the very spot where I stood. I knew him too: it was Beaujean.

To see all this scarcely occupied a minute, and I had no time to look again, for just above my head that cry was repeated, amidst a sudden scuffling of feet and the breaking of glass and woodwork.

"I'll burn the house and all in it, but you shall come!" said a voice, in a hoarse whisper. "It's too late now for anything else, my proud beauty, and I should gain nothing by being too tender with you; and yet I swear by Heaven that I would study your slightest whim, listen to your softest whisper——"

"You may strike me dead if you will, but I will never loose my hold," said a panting voice. "Adelaide! Adelaide;" it cried, "help me."

"Ah! you may call for Adelaide, but she is too far off to hear you, my dainty lady. I wouldn't wound those ivory fingers for the world, but you'll compel me. I tell you that if all the devils in——"

I heard no more. I knew that voice—both voices; and, with all the strength I had, sprang up and caught a projecting cornice above the buttress, to which I clung with knees and feet until I could find a firmer handhold. Another effort, and I threw my left hand over the bottom of a light iron rail, part of the ornamental trellis-work. Then I could draw myself up until my knee rested on the edge of the stones, and in another moment I had lifted myself clean over, and stood close beside the space from which a window had been broken, and its very woodwork rent away, as though it had been chopped down with an axe. Within the room to which it led a lamp was burning on the table, but it was dashed to the ground before I had gained a footing. There was a faint cry, and Beatrice Fairhoe darted out and ran towards the front, where the light was brightest.

"Ha! ha!" shouted Sanchez; for I had seen him in that momentary glimpse before the light went out. "The ladder's there, my beauty. You are mine now, unless you have a stray bullet from the drunken cattle down yonder."

"Stop!" I shouted, as I saw that the frightened girl was trying to gain admission to the window whence the shots had come only a few minutes before. "Beatrice! Miss Fairhoe! I am here; and your father is here also. Come back, I say!"

In fear for her, I might almost have forgotten that Sanchez was at my heels, had he not run against me in his hurry. There was no room for him to pass; and so, without waiting for the knife that was even then half out of his sleeve, I—well, I'm really obliged to confess that it was vulgar; but I had no time for etiquette—I resorted to an old gipsy trick, stooped suddenly, and as he fell over me pitched him headlong over the balcony.

There are moments when every fibre of the body seems to act in unison under a strong will or the influence of ungovernable anger; and that was one of them. The mob outside had heard their leader's shriek of pain and rage—had seen him fall, and came running up. With the remaining strength that seemed to have come to me by some almost supernatural means, I caught Beatrice in my arms, and carried her into the room from which she had come. "A light!" I said to myself, "a light!" as I ran against a chair and gently placed her on it.

"There is one in the next room," she answered, quietly; "but that—that bad man has locked the door and taken the key."

I thought she had fainted.

"You know me, then, Beatrice dear—Miss Fairhoe?" I stammered, stooping over the chair and touching her hand. I think some magnetic influence guided me to that hand, though we were in the dark.

"I knew you would come back to me," she said, in a low voice; and either I was dazed with fatigue and

knew nothing certainly, or I felt her warm, soft lips touch my cheek.

A light suddenly streamed into the room, the door was gently opened, and I started back, wondering what new danger threatened us.

"Missee, Missee Beatrice! are you here, dear Missee?" said a low, whispering voice, and Adelaide, the quadroon girl, came into the room. She started back when she saw me; but when she found out who it was, she beckoned me to follow into the inner room.

"I must barricade this window first," I said, "and you can help me if you will."

We piled all the furniture that we could find against the broken shutters. Then she took me by the arm, and, with an awestricken face, said,

"I have killed him! It was fate. I knew it. Now it is done, but I can't look at him."

"Killed him?" I cried, in dismay. "For Heaven's sake, speak! Who is it?"

"Pietro Sanchez. He came in here after Missee. He followed me into the little blue room: there I killed him. He lies there now. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Pietro Sanchez lies where I have just thrown him over the balcony. What can you mean?"

"What?" she screamed. "Come with me! come with me!"

She snatched up the light from the table, and led me swiftly through a narrow passage to a small apartment, scantily furnished, and painted blue, both walls and ceiling. On the ground lay the body of a man, in

the ordinary white clothes of the country, his face downward, resting upon his arm, which lay in a pool of blood upon the floor.

"He came in here chasing me, and I led him away from Missee; and when he wanted to catch me, I turned, and——. You know that little knife? Well, that's it!"

She pointed to the dead man, and I stooped to raise him. I had grown suddenly callous, I think, amidst all that bloodshed and strife. The pale-yellow rays of the candle fell upon the yellower face.

"Sancho Mark!" I exclaimed, recoiling.

"His brother!" shrieked Adelaide. "Ah-h-h-h! Now I see—now I see how much and yet how little he is like Pietro. But it was nearly dark, and I could not look at him for fear—for fear that when I saw his face——. Never mind. Pietro Mark! you villain, pirate, slave-catcher, and worse! but you gentleman. Not like Sancho. That's why you change your name—that and *other* things. And so I have *not* killed you; but I must."

She went out of the room to seek her mistress, and I followed her that I might lead them both to Mr. Fairhoe. We had scarcely got to the door behind that heavy curtain leading to the great room when a volley was fired from within, a crunching, scuffling sound, followed by yells and groans, seemed to rise up close to us and then retreat to a great distance, and a loud "hurrah!" in Mr. Fairhoe's own voice, welcomed us as a second volley rattled just underneath the windows.

"Hurrah! hurrah! I'll make Juba a provision if

he outlives me, I swear," he said, as he grasped my hand and strained his daughter to his breast. He had reached Kingston before we met in the road there, and has just brought a company of soldiers on in a couple of light waggons. There's their captain! Who was that that fell over the balcony, Day? It couldn't have been the big black fellow, that seemed like a leader; for I shot him myself a minute ago. We should have had the place on fire in another ten minutes."

"It was Pietro Sanchez," I said.

"Oh, papa!" cried Beatrice; and she whispered something into her father's ear which made him seize me by both hands again, while she came and put her own little taper fingers (all cut and bruised I saw, to my dismay) upon my arm, and——. Well, I think I should have had that same crazy fancy about her lips again if Mr. Fairhoe hadn't been looking; but he was looking, and with the same curious, inquiring expression that I had noticed before.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TOUCH OF A VANISHED HAND.

THE Betsy Jane was ready for the homeward voyage, cargo stowed, bills of lading complete, the crew ready to man the windlass and up anchor at a moment's notice. Old Captain Prendergast, dressed in his blue coat with brass buttons, and his best pair of loose duck trousers, was fidgeting about on deck, passing a word now and then with Bos'n Shadwell, who, having also donned his best rig, was loosening the largest of the ship's boats at the davits ready to go on shore with a couple of men to bring off passengers. Everything was as clean and trim as a dozen sturdy fellows could make it with mops, holystone, spare canvas, new rope, and holiday bunting; the captain's cabin and that which adjoined it were both decorated with all the available movables that could be got together in the rather limited space, and *a carpet had been laid down*, whereat some of the men forward grinned in a wondering sort of way.

"Another half-hour yet, I think, sir," said the mate, as Mr. Prendergast referred to his big chronometer. "I hope the lady won't keep us waiting, or we shall

lose this wind, and perhaps be knocking about outside here for another day or two."

"You may as well lower away, Shadwell," replied the captain, "in case there 's any more luggage, and you won't have no time to lose. Give my respectful compliments to Miss Fairhoe, and say, as I do hope that she ain't put about by our wantin' to take advantage of the wind, and if she'll be so good as to have all her traps that ain't here a'ready, down at the quay afore you come off. Not as I see what else there can be by this time," continued the captain, thoughtfully, "when there's half-a-dozen chests, as big as houses a'most, down below, besides a sight o' small trunks an' parcels; but, Lord love them dear creeturs of women, an' especially sech sweet young things as her, how can I tell what they mightn't want all at the last moment. If you'll lower away, Shadwell, I'll jest go and give a look round, to see as everythink's shipshape below; and Mr. Day, perhaps you'll come with me, sir, to give what I may call a finishin' touch, if so be as any's needed."

As the good old man had been below for the purpose of "having a look round," at least twenty times in the past two hours, and as the table was set out for lunch with a wonderful collection of glass and old-fashioned plate, destined to set off the dishes in which the cook was already concentrating his limited powers with the aid of a couple of boys who were to wait at table, there was very little to be done; but I went below with the best grace I could assume—though I had already taken up my station at the side, and was looking eagerly

towards the shore, as though by a miracle of vision I might be able to distinguish the approach of the party for whom we waited.

Yes, Walter Fairhoe and his daughter were going to England, and never had I looked forward to any event with such anticipation and yet with such anxious fear. No adventurer who ever put to sea in the hope of finding some coast of gold or island of pearls could have felt his heart beat higher than did mine when I thought of the treasure that was to freight our old merchant ship. No fortunate rover ever woke in his hammock to listen to the storm that might make wreck of all that he had won, with deeper dismay than mine when I reflected how that very voyage, made in company with Beatrice Fairhoe, might in effect be bearing us further apart for all time to come.

For I loved her.

I had never told her so, unless she had interpreted the silent language of my looks during the days that succeeded that terrible night. How dared I even to cherish the hope that she would so interpret it? I, whose claim even to the name I bore was founded only on the fancy of some parish official; whose childhood had been unnoted by any but strangers; to whom the very hope that had been whispered of a time when I might come to the inheritance of a mother's love was overshadowed by a doubt. No. Not till the end of that long, wearisome voyage could I dare to speak; and even then would Walter Fairhoe, in whom the pride of his race only found a new expression, see in a mere pensioner upon the bounty of strangers,—one who

sought to claim the right to bear another name, and that name his own, a fitting suitor for his daughter? Heaven help me! I had never inherited a mother's love, or the inheritance had never yet come to me; and now I would forego all that I had hoped from that possession, would seek to begin anew with the name I bore, given me in charity by a workhouse guardian, and so my very own. There would be less chance of my losing that, since no one would dispute it; and the very fact of a dispute must throw the shadow of doubt upon me ever after. I would relinquish everything for that one slender hope, would implore Mr. Ravel to do no more in my behalf except to show me some way of living—and then—— Ah! then the long years would go by and find me, perhaps, a grey-headed man, cherishing the memory of a love that had never been whispered to her who had passed out of my sight, but was still enshrined in my life.

So, backward and forward heaved my tempest-tossed heart, every day bringing fresh pain and some new resolution, which was vanquished by the sight of a face that brightened, as I fancied, when it looked at me—by the soft pressure of a hand that had begun to tremble as it was placed in mine. The outbreak of the negroes at Spring Hill had only hastened Mr. Fairhoe's intention of going to England, but it also had the effect of making him poorer than he had expected to be; since the sale of the estate was rendered difficult until a purchaser could be found who would be able to transfer new hands to the plantations, and willing to

take possession almost immediately on the completion of his bargain.

The whole household, except Juba and another male servant, and Adelaide, who consented to stay with her young mistress, was broken up at once; and Beatrice went to stay at Mr. Clark's house, near Kingston, the day after the events recorded in the last chapter.

It must have been a matter for speculation with the good-natured agent and his kind wife what could have kept me so constantly hanging about his garden; and I fear that their daughter, a sentimental young creature of fourteen or fifteen, had very serious suspicions of me. But I could not keep away. I excused this to myself with the pretence that Beatrice was in some sort committed to my charge until she was in absolute safety; and, though it would have been difficult to imagine any very serious danger which I could have averted, the frequent absence both of her father and the master of the house on the business which was so imperative, gave a shadow of reason for my constant watchfulness.

At last, when that business was concluded, and Mr. Fairhoe, having made all the necessary arrangements for leaving his old friends, gave himself up to a week of farewell visits, I retired to the cabin of the Betsy Jane, and there, to relieve my own overburdened soul, made a partial confidant of Captain Prendergast, who, entering into the subject with unbounded sympathy and all the romantic effusion of his gentle and unsophisticated nature, was one of the worst possible allies

for anyone requiring the counsel of mere worldly wisdom.

Perhaps it was this series of visiting, in which I felt that I could have no share, that awakened me to the wide difference that would stand between me and Walter Fairhoe when the voyage was over. It is true that he had professed to owe me a debt of gratitude which he could never repay; but I placed no other meaning on such acknowledgments than they would properly bear. My endeavour to save Beatrice from a great danger, even had it been more perilous to myself, gave me no right to obtrude my attentions, or to expect that I should be afterwards allowed the privileges of an intimate acquaintance.

The Betsy Jane had become a floating prison to me during those three or four days when I waited on board for our passengers, and I had no well-grounded hope that it would be otherwise when the sails were spread to carry us home. Yet, when I at last made out our boat coming towards the vessel from the shore, with a figure sitting there all white, and looking in the distance like some soft snowy-plumed bird, the sun seemed to shine more brightly, the rippling water sparkling against the prow murmured musically, the air grew lighter; and, as I sprang to the side where the boat would soon come below the chair that had been rigged for the lady to come on deck, I felt my heart dancing to a wild kind of tune, the meaning of which I would not pause to analyse. Then, as the boat came nearer, I could see the oar-blades flashing in the light, could hear the low rattle on the thole-pins, and was

conscious of a little white hand waving a handkerchief to the shore. Another moment, and the sweet face that had been looking back glanced upward to the place where I stood, and then the handkerchief was waved not to the shore but to me. The boat slewed round towards the vessel's quarter, the men unshipped their oars and grappled on to the side; and for one brief, blissful moment I held that soft snow-white dove to my breast as I lifted her to the deck where Captain Prendergast was standing, to give her and her father welcome. We were a rather silent party at the luncheon which ensued. It was a grander affair than even the worthy captain had intended, for Juba and a black boy, who came as part of the family, had charge of a host of luxuries from Kingston, and the boat was stowed with furniture, which transformed the little cabin, once Captain Maylie's berth, into a boudoir.

"My dear Day," said Beatrice's father, as we walked on deck after dinner, "what is your connection with the Fairhoes?"

"I was tutor to Mr. Oswald Fairhoe's son," I replied; "and I knew him well."

"And you knew Mrs. Fairhoe, too, I suppose? She was a Miss Caroline Blamyre, wasn't she?" he asked, with that curious look in his face.

"I have heard that the second Mrs. Fairhoe was formerly Miss Blamyre," I said, hesitatingly; "but——"

"Yes, the first. Her name was Waine, if I remember rightly. Did you know her?"

"No."

"Never saw her, even?"

"No."

"Mr. Day, what brought you to Jamaica?"

"Fate—or Providence, rather—I believe."

"You didn't come to find out any of your relations? By-the-by, *have* you any relations in Jamaica?"

We looked at each other; and, though there was something quick, imperious, as well as searching in his glance, there was nothing offensive in it. The time must come when I should be compelled to tell him my history or lose the dearest hope of my life. Why not tell it him now?

"I have no relations in Jamaica, to my knowledge," I said; "and I never suspected that I had two there when I started on the voyage that has ended so strangely. That I think I have found them now, I will confess, and I will tell you why."

"Tell on. But stay a minute; I'll just knock at Beatrice's door, and see if she is well; and would you mind rousing Juba, to make us a jug of Antigua punch?"

In a quarter of an hour I was deep in this history; in an hour, during which Captain Prendergast had joined us, Mr. Fairhoe stretched his hand across the table, and grasped mine like a vice.

"I acknowledge you as a relation," he said, "even on the present evidence. That fact dawned upon me some time ago on the testimony of your own face; but—pardon me, you are a gentleman, and will know that I am one, and so cannot mean to be offensive in such a matter—I don't yet know *what* relation. I am willing to take it for granted that my cousin Oswald's

first wife is dead, and that her name was Barbara Waine. I knew her name nearly twenty years ago, my dear boy. I am willing, I say, to take all that for granted, as far as I am concerned; but you will see how much it will involve, and I can only agree to accept it as truth until steps have been taken to establish it. One more word," he added, seeing that I was about to speak. "I rely upon your honour in this: My daughter Beatrice—— Pshaw! why shouldn't I speak plainly? I am a young man still, I believe, and I can speak to you with all the frankness of youth. It is not altogether impossible that you may fancy you are in love with her. I don't wish to flatter your vanity, but I admit the possibility of her fancying that she is in love with you. I say these things *may* be; I know nothing; what I suspect is another thing altogether. I trust to your honour, I say, that you will in this respect forget the great service you have done me and her, and make no avowal, as, of course, you will seek none."

"Pardon me, if I am obliged to refer once more to myself and Beatr—— and Miss Fairhoe," I said; "but I cannot assure you that no such words as those that you forbid have not been uttered by me; though I cannot repeat or remember them. They are never to be repeated till I can claim a name and a place in the world, even though it should not be *the* name that you think would honour me most."

"At least *you* will see how necessary it is to let this rest, without pledging yourself or her until you can take your own proper place in the world."

"I will try soon to take *some* place in the world," I replied. "I will also vindicate my right to take another name; but it is a right I shall never willingly assume. My name is Valentine Fairhoe, I *know*, and will prove in good time; but from this night I refuse to bear it. Till I knew you it was never associated in my mind with honour—not even with what the world calls honour; and it will bring none to me."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

A FUNERAL hatchment hung heavily on the front of the dreary town house where the Bullpoints lived during the London season; and several noble families showed some tokens of mourning; for not only had the family vault opened to receive the gilt velvet coffin of Sir Langley, the head of the house, but another loss had occurred to deepen the tokens of grief; and its shadow, darkening a wider space than was recognised by that select circle of the aristocracy, fell upon me.

Mrs. Oswald Fairhoe was dead.

That proud, handsome lady—who, as Caroline Blamyre, had been a reigning beauty at a time when the reign of beauties in that sense was declining—had faded out of life. That seeming renewal of confidence between her and her husband had come too late, and left so much for her to discover, that the light proved to be lightning, and struck her down. Not visibly at once—but at heart—vitally. Everybody thought she had renewed her strength, so carefully did she hide the scathe; but it had gone deep, and her heart was seared. She died at that very house, and there her boy was left

in the guardianship of the Hon. Vivian Bullpoint, who, to tell the truth, had accepted the trust willingly.

One happy hope the poor lady had cherished before her death: that her boy would find some gentle soul to care for him as she had tried to care—she whose soul had had so little gentleness, had known so little love; and her prayer was answered, for Mrs. Gabriel was at that bedside. It was on her bosom that the motherless lad laid his head in a passionate burst of tears after his father had fled to shut himself up in the gloomy house at Fairhoe.

How my own life had changed since I last walked through the London streets, fresh from those green lanes and corn-fields where I had led such a quiet, dreamy, happy time, with books for my companions, and my dear master for my friend! How it had changed since that earlier time when London was a stony desert to me, and I stood forlorn and friendless, waiting for the chance of a scanty meal!

Yes, the world was indeed changed;—but love—love and death remained. There was love, I knew, for I had a welcome home such as I had never hoped for; and my dear old benefactress received me as though I had been a hero from the wars, and the old house in Deerfoot-lane was festive in my honour. Mr. Ravel, too, had heard something of me even before he came to see me at Mr. Letsom's the day after my arrival. I had nothing to conceal, and, though I could not even then allude to Beatrice without blushing, I told my story truthfully, I think, and I hope, modestly. Mrs. Petifer renewed her youth at the intelligence, and,

though she quite agreed with her nephew, who counselled me strictly to observe my agreement with Walter Fairhoe, she saw no reason why she should not call on that gentleman and his daughter, and, accordingly, drove in a hired carriage to the hotel where they were staying.

More than that, they visited her in return, at least Beatrice did; and if honour forbade us to talk of engagement when we met in Deerfoot-lane, no power on earth could have prevented our looking love.

But these opportunities were few, for Walter Fairhoe had friends to visit, and Beatrice was a constant guest at houses where I had no entrée. It was not till the end of the season that I had much chance of seeing either her or her father, though Mr. Ravel met them both constantly at the parties where he was a visitor. I had all sorts of vague apprehensions, and my position frightened me, for I felt that I was as much a pauper now as ever I had been in those childish days which seemed so far off; that I lived on the bounty of others in a sense more degrading than that which had belonged to my first year with Mr. Waine.

Nobody could tell with certainty what would be the result of our appeal to my father, who still remained shut up in his gloomy house alone, and, as I believed, with a breaking heart. Mr. Walter Fairhoe, too, had come to England to claim a large proportion of the land belonging to the estate, deeply mortgaged as it now was; and then—was I the rightful heir to the residue? I might be the legal, but was I the rightful heir? I said no, for Mr. Waine and Mr. Scarthey had

written "No," as I knew they would. Mrs. Letsom said "Yes," and her handsome dark eyes quite flashed with indignation when her husband mildly interposed arguments for and against the proposition; but she gave way, just as Mrs. Petifer (who, dear old lady, had been quite on the side of legal right) gave way after seeing Mr. Ravel. For Mr. Ravel had met Mrs. Gabriel, and at Mrs. Gabriel's side stood a pale, delicate, beautiful boy, dressed in deep mourning; and the law gave way to the gospel then, for the very next day Mr. Ravel took me to see them also; and my pupil who knew nothing of my story, had his arms round my neck and blushed, as boys will, at the sudden impulse of old affection; and then a tide, of what I hope was grateful love, came over my heart, and I felt,—"God do so to me, and more also, if I take what should be yours as well as mine from you;" and, when we walked away from the house, I said to Mr. Ravel, "I will have nothing that Oswald does not share."

The time for the Australian mail arrived, and the answer from my mother came. How I hung over the writing, traced the slim delicate characters, and tried to make them suggest to me what the writer was like! They chilled my heart a little, for though they said, "Oh! why can he not come to me, for I may never live to see him in this world, and he is my child?" they also said, "I owe this duty to my father in any case. He is too feeble to make the journey, and I will not leave him to die here among strangers."

So the time had passed for waiting, and Mr. Ravel

wrote to Oswald Fairhoe to say that he should visit him in the following week. I was to go down a day or two in advance, for I had a fancy to travel the same road by which I made the journey from London years before.

It was arranged that I should put up at the hotel at Grundon, where Mr. Ravel would join me; for Walter Fairhoe and Beatrice were already staying in the gloomy old house, the master of which had asserted the privilege of making them his guests.

I will not describe that journey, or dwell upon the strange dreamy condition in which I paid a visit to Mr. Scarthey, and went over the prison, from which he had retired on a small pension to live in a neat cottage a little way out of the town and near to his brother-in-law. I could not if I would, tell of my meeting with my dear old master, still young and fresh in heart and feeling; nor of the mingled emotions with which at last I looked up at the new building that had superseded the old Grundon Union, and, seeing a little pauper child at a lower window, went and bought a packet of sweets, and handed the parcel to the little creature on the end of my walking-stick. I was standing at the entrance to the hotel the same evening, smoking a cigar under an archway leading to the stable yard, where a horse was being harnessed to a light chaise in a hurry, and the stableman, a grey, bristly, surly old ruffian, was swearing and grumbling audibly at being called out of the tap. While I was wondering who could be going to the house to which I also was bound (for I had heard

the waiter give the order for the chaise), the traveller came into the yard, carrying a small leather portmanteau, of which he seemed particularly careful, and which he deposited under the seat before he climbed into his place and took the reins. Then, as the surly stableman handed him his great coat with what I thought was a too familiar grin, I heard that the name of the traveller was Ralph Fairhoe.

"Oh! that's how you take notice of an old pal, is it, Master Ralph?" muttered the old man, as he let go the reins and the chaise rattled out of the yard. "Harry Jershaw aint good enough for you now, eh? You don't remember the times that you've sponged on him after you'd killed the old Squire, eh?"

Mr. Ravel would not arrive till the next morning, and I was too restless either to sit in the coffee-room listening to the ticking of a big dusty clock and trying to read an old newspaper or to go at once to bed, so I went for a stroll round the town. It was late when I returned, but sleep was as far from my eyes as ever, and, as a porter was up all night, I lighted a fresh cigar and went out again, turning towards the main road. It was a bright night, but the wind was rising and a few black clouds drifted across the moon, blotting out the landscape at intervals or throwing fantastic shadows on the level fields. I took no note of time, but wandered on until I reached the cottage where Harrick had once lived, now half ruined, and with boards nailed across the door and windows. I was standing, thinking how bare and melancholy it looked, when a sudden gust of wind compelled me to

turn round, for fear of losing my hat. In that moment I saw a red flicker in the direction of the great house. Before I could speculate on it, it had changed to a strong glare, which quivered high above the ground. The house was on fire, and when I reached it some of the servants and labourers were already clustered round the door; for the domestics had escaped the back way, through the offices.

Yes. Fire! Its long tongues were already darting through one window of the upper story, and the red shimmer of the blaze shone upon the front of the house, when the glass splintered, and smoke and flame burst out together, lapping the stonework of the roof. As the window fell in amidst a shower of sparks, a group of half-dressed women came out screaming from the door of the wing where the servants' offices were partly separated from the main building.

They were followed by half a dozen men, who ran calling for pails and buckets, and seemed to have some confused intention of putting out the flame. There were hurry and confusion everywhere; and when I ran to ask in what part of the house the fire had broken out, and if any of the inmates had escaped, I could get no answer except that old Mr. James wasn't there, and that the landing was all ablaze above the great staircase. I had no time to hear more, for one of the men ran past me with an axe and made for the front door. It would have been madness to hew it down or break it open, for the wind was still rising, and, even if the man had himself been bold enough to mount the stairs with the first rush of air, the fire would burn like a

furnace in less than a minute. He had already lifted his axe to make a blow at the heavy lock, when another man came darting along the path as though he had appeared suddenly from the shadow of the hedge, and caught his wrist before the blow fell.

"Do you want to burn 'em all out, as though they were a nest of ants?" he cried. "If that door opens there won't be a stick of timber left in the place in half an hour. Come with me and find a ladder, man; and let's see who'll be up first through the window above there!"

"Rory!" I cried; "Rory Lee!" It was indeed my old friend the gipsy; but we had scarcely time to look at each other, for a chain rattled, a bolt shot on the other side of the door, and Walter Fairhoe staggered out, carrying a woman in his arms.

Rory had closed the door again in a moment, and now held it by the heavy knocker, while I sprang forward to support that drooping figure. "Thank Heaven!" gasped Walter Fairhoe, "that the staircase was not alight. What! you here, Valentine? We may do some service yet; but, don't you see she has fainted?"

I had taken her gently from him; but what was it that caused me suddenly to turn her face towards the reflection of the blaze? Did I miss that subtle electric influence which should have thrilled me at the touch? "Where is Beatrice?" I cried; "where is Beatrice?"

"Good Heavens!" panted Walter Fairhoe, staring wildly into the girl's face as she lay there on the grass.

"Help me, Valentine! help me, my boy! I must go back; she is there still. This is her maid. She was standing at the bed-room door—the chintz room—in the midst of the smoke, and I caught her as she fell, thinking it was my daughter."

I could not wait, I dared not.

"Go round to the side of the house beneath the esplanade," I said, almost in a whisper. "Don't follow me, for God's sake. I know the house well. Make way, Rory," I cried, rushing to the door.

"What for?" said the gipsy, coolly. "Wait for the ladders; it's no use shutting yourself like a rat in a trap."

"I will pass," I said; "I must save her."

"Save who?"

"Beatrice Fairhoe! Make way, I tell you, Rory, or I'll strike you down, I will, by Heaven! I love her, and she is mine."

The door opened, and I leaped in; then I heard it close behind me with a crash. "Keep your head down, and quick, for your life," said a stifled voice close to my ear as I flew to the stairs.

"What! you there, Rory?"

"Yes. Do you know the room?"

"The one next the oak room, there, to the right."

"Not there! not there!" he cried; "she is farther on." And he pulled me away down the long corridor, now filled with smoke, but to a part to which the fire had not yet reached. There, standing against the wall, was Beatrice, and, as I caught sight of her, she held out her arms to me and fell forward upon my shoulder.

At the end of this passage there was, I remembered, a window leading to a sort of leaden roof overhanging a corner of the esplanade which ran round a part of the house; and Rory, who seemed to know the place as well as I did, had already leaped upon the sill ready to lift Beatrice out. The moment the window was opened the wind, rushing in, blew back smoke and flame, and made the fire roar and the sparks fly; but in less time than it takes to tell of we had crept out upon the roof and closed the sash after us. There was a great cry from below, amidst which I heard the voice of a negro, and the next moment a ladder was placed against the verandah, and the faithful Juba helped his mistress down. She had not fainted; but when she looked round and was unable to see her father she fell upon the ground.

"Where is Mr. Fairhoe?" I asked, as the women servants carried her away.

"Mr. Oswald, sir? he ain't been seen since he went into his own room for the night; and Mr. Walter Fairhoe's gone to try if he can help him."

"This way!" I shouted to Rory, running round the house. "It's no use now; the whole place must burn until the engines come, if they come at all." They *had* come, and, with such water as they could obtain, had already begun to play upon the front, where the fire seemed to rage. As we started off, a fireman came round and called the men to work with buckets, as well as with the pump. "This way, then!" I cried; "the fire has burnt through the floor, as sure as we are alive!"

The window through which I had looked so long ago was shuttered; but through the crevices I could see a red glimmer and hear the crackling of wood. Before I could speak a word, Rory had found the man who carried the axe, and was hewing through frame and glass. Then, casting the axe away, he dashed in, and I followed him. The ceiling was ablaze, and red-hot sparks dropped through from the floor above, close to the door, where the wainscot was alight. Amidst the fire and fume, Oswald Fairhoe sat before his table, on which his head lay upon his outstretched arms. His cousin had reached him by some means, and urged him to escape—even lifted him bodily from his chair, but he made no response. The retreat of the door was almost cut off, for the burning laths and hot timbers began to fall in front of it. He was either dead or in a stupor, from which not even fire could wake him. We carried him amongst us into the open air, dashed water from a bucket in his face, but only a deep sigh showed that he still lived. Leaving the servants to take charge of the burning house, we bore him to the nearest farm, on a rough litter made of a hurdle, on which we spread a horsecloth and some straw. Beatrice had already been taken to the same shelter by some of the women folk, and a groom had ridden off to Grundon for a surgeon. To my intense surprise, he returned, in less than half an hour, with Mr. Letsom, who had accompanied Mr. Ravel on his journey.

We were a strange company sitting in that close stuffy room which the honest farm people called the

best parlour, and did us honour by devoting to our service, along with the best tea service and the pair of huge plated candlesticks, in which a couple of coarse tallow candles flared and guttered in the draught from the disused fireplace: all silent, weary, and anxious, for in the room above lay the master of Fairhoe, my father, who had never yet acknowledged me, and who might die without doing me the only justice that I could hope for at his hands.

We had removed such traces of the fire from our clothes and faces as could be got rid of in the kitchen by means of hot water and rough towels; and Beatrice sat in a great easy-chair in the corner wrapped in shawls and dressed in the housewife's best gown. Rory Lee had gone back to the scene of the disaster. Mr. Ravel was talking earnestly to Walter Fairhoe and his daughter, and I half stupified, and with my thoughts all wandering, looked out of the low lattice window, seeing nothing in the darkness beyond but uncertain shapes, which seemed to coincide with my own half-formed fancies.

A low tap came at the door, and when I turned to answer it a fireman beckoned me out.

"Look here, sir," he said, holding up a leather valise, the outside of which was all scorched and blistered; "two of my mates got into the house yonder by the back way, and so as fur as the room where the fire began—that is, not the room itself, you understand, but to another little room that opens into it o' t'other side—a sort of ante-room, as the sayin' is. We'd got the fire pretty well under there, and they

tries to force the door, very gently at first, becos they didn't know whether there might be any floor o' t'other side; then they pushed harder, an' there was somethin' keepin' it shut. They got it open, pushin' the somethin' away, and that somethin' was, I'm sorry to say, the body of a gent as was a-stayin' in the house. Not burnt he warn't to speak of, except his hair and all about his face an' hands; an' he'd fell down sudden, we think, perhaps stifled by the smoke, though *that* we doubt. He's dead, sir, at all events, and this here was clutched in his hand—he half lay upon it, as though it had been under him when he fell."

I bade the man wait, and carried the valise into the room. There was no doubt who the dead man was. We all knew directly that it was Ralph Fairhoe; and Walter cut round the lock and opened the bag without another word. It contained a book; a thick, leather-bound volume, fastened with a heavy clasp. Mr. Ravel opened it at the first page: it was the volume containing the registers of the parish church of St. Boniface, in the city of London; and, when he turned the leaves with rapid fingers and stopped at an entry near the end, my heart almost stood still; for he pointed to the record of the marriage of Oswald Fairhoe and Barbara Waine.

"The doctor says, will all you gentlemen go up stairs, and very softly. The master wants to see you, I think—poor dear! poor dear!—though he can't; for he's quite blind like, and only just left off wandering in his mind," said the good farmer's wife, coming into the room.

We all went up the creaking stairs into that room about which the hush of death seemed to have gathered already. Dr. Letsom held up his finger and beckoned me to the bedside, then poured something from a phial on the table and held it to the patient's lips.

"Let him come to me," said a faint voice from the bed. "I cannot see him; but if my cousin Walter is here he will know. Did I hear that Mr. Ravel was coming to me? No; to-morrow. To-morrow; that will be too late, perhaps; so let them come up now."

"I am here, my poor dear fellow," said Ravel, in a quivering voice.

"And I, too, Oswald," said Walter, touching the white hand that lay upon the coverlid.

"Don't let Ralph in—he has come to tempt me, and I will not work more evil before I die. Who said that the boy was here—the boy you call Valentine Day? He did you good service you told me, Walter. He is my son. He is my own true son, and his mother was my wife, God forgive me! I wish he could forgive me, too."

I knelt down at the beside, and held the hand that Walter had relinquished. "I forgive you ten times over," I said. "Say that you never meant wrong to me—I know that you never did so—nor to my mother either in your inmost heart. Father, don't talk of dying. I know all that sad, dreadful history, and——"

Doctor Letsom shook his finger; a change flickered on that white upturned face, which turned to me as the lips strove to speak. No words came, and we thought that he was dead, when suddenly he drew me

nearer with his hand. "Poor little Oswald!" he whispered.

"You are his father, and he is *my* brother," I sobbed.

The pressure of his hand tightened. Another pause, and then, making an effort at every word, "Will you go to her? to my wife, to Barbara, and ask her—to—forgive ——"

Again that change, not flickering now, but settling into the unaltered lineaments of death.

"Come down," said a low voice; "you can do no more here," and, starting as a hand was laid upon my shoulder, I found that I had been, how long I knew not, kneeling by that bed alone.

The grey dawn was creeping up the sky, the rosy arrows of the day had pierced the early mists and played upon the diamond panes of the lattice window in the farm parlour, when I woke from a dream that was not born of sleep, and, looking up, found Beatrice kneeling on a low stool at my feet as I lay in the great chair. Tears were on her face, a solemn look in her eyes, as she rose and kissed me.

"Valentine!"

"Beatrice!"

No need of more words. We were divided no longer.

Not divided, but separated for a time, for I had a sacred duty to fulfil—a father's repentance to convey, a mother's love to seek. Wonderful mission—wonderful quest, but both accomplished.

In that new land I seemed to grow into a new life,

and the bond that held me to the old world and the old love was never weakened by it.

That meeting with the white-haired man, my grandfather, and how that deferred inheritance, that wealth of love, came to be mine, indeed—these are a part of my history that I cannot tell. Other inheritance and other wealth were there, too, but they were—thank Heaven! they were—dwarfed and, for a time, unheeded in the greater riches.

Once more the angel of death came with gentle wings; and when the first solemn recollection of the visitor was over, and the old man laid in his grave by the sea, other wings were spread, and, amidst farewells and tears from loving friends, the white sails carried mother and son to England; to one so full of solemn memories, fond regrets, deep, but at last, not overwhelming sorrows; to the other the scene of painful reminiscences but of more ardent hopes.

"On condition that he shall not bear the name of Fairhoe," said the will of Silas Waine; and that stern line gave me a chill when I thought of it, for I feared that the old pride would be still strong enough in her father to mar my suit with Beatrice.

I think it would have been, but Walter Fairhoe had himself settled down upon his own lands, and the old house had been replaced by a more modern structure, so that he represented all the past generations of the family honour in his own person, and was worthy of greater distinction. He shrugged his shoulders certainly when I declared my firm intention of relinquishing all claim to the remnant of those estates

which were mine by legal right; but I had made that determination long before.

I had scarcely set foot on shore before I was glad at heart that I had given up that last shred of justice; for, as I stood upon the quay, a tall, pale, handsome boy sprang forward, and an arm was round my neck, only to be withdrawn when he saw my mother; then he reddened, and said gently,

"I should not have come, I know; but my aunt is here, and I wanted to tell you that you need fear no opposition from me, even if I could offer it."

I could think of nothing better to say then than to repeat the words that I had spoken to my father—"We are brothers!"

Was it strange that Mr. Ravel, making himself joint guardian of this orphan boy, should marry that gentle widow, Mrs. Gabriel? He is happier for it. It has mellowed many tender memories in him and made his latter days better than his first.

That Rory Lee should enter into partnership with that grey, grim old sergeant, and that their school of art and arms should prosper, was a thing not out of the pale of possibility; but it was highly improbable that the gipsy would stick to business, and he didn't; for, when he got tired of London, he went wandering; and, from what we heard, he haunted Fairhoe. We—that is, my mother, Beatrice, and I—lived in London at first, and it was there that I had a letter from Weevil.

Did I say that Weevil was a sort of steward or manager to my dear friend Andrew Paterson? Yes,

he was indeed, for he had married Liza at last, and she had taken him to the other side of the world.

Weevil's letter said:—

"If there isn't gold in the land that dips down by the Rock Gully, there's none in Australia; so don't you sell it to nobody."

"I shall have to go back to Australia, Beatrice," I said, when I showed my wife the letter, and there, perhaps, we shall found a new family. Who knows? There'll be no more Fairhoes; for I don't think Oswald will marry, and you know he's the last of the race."

THE END.

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